

ERTH JOURNAL

Issue 36

Vol 3, no.9

Celebrating Greyhawk at

GaryCon XIV

The best festival of all!

NEW
CUSTOMS
FOR THE
WORLD OF
GREYHAWK!

12 Ales

7 festivals

4 NPCs

3 Magical items

Enjoy the
Brewer's Competition
In Saltmarsh!

RICHFEST CUSTOMS!

Samuel Dillon, and Thomas Kelly

**Bee Keepers
of Badwall**

Lore of Elven Trees

VISIT CHILLY CREEK DURING BREWFEST

BOTTOMS UP!! BEERS OF GREYHAWK!

Librarian's Chronicle

Each of us has memories of a celebration we've been to which have stuck with us over the years. Whether a trip, a family gathering, a special present we got, a particular friend or family member—holidays, celebrations, and festivals are important to us.

I remember one year my family went to Taos for Christmas. Even though I had rarely ever been around snow in my young life, I didn't care about skiing, making a snowman, or even snowball fights. The thing I remember most is the cowboy/Sherriff costume I got. It had a "real" cowboy hat, a metal badge (not a plastic one), a holster belt with dual six-shooter cap guns, and I even got a special western shirt and vest! I wouldn't take that outfit off all weekend, and my parents couldn't hardly get me out of it for weeks!

Holidays are significant to us, culturally, especially the things we often keep which remind us of a particular celebration. The world of Greyhawk is definitely no exception. This issue isn't *entirely* themed for everything to relate to holidays—but, many of the articles relate in *some way*. And there's a couple of significant featured articles that have interesting articles about customs in various places.

Now, it's time for an annual real-world celebration—GaryCon, in its 14th year! GHO is sponsoring a seminar, *Celebrating Greyhawk: A Fandom Renaissance*. Begun as a memorial to Gary Gygax when he passed, GaryCon is now an enormous gathering, celebrating gaming where thousands of friends assemble to play games, socialize, and meet even more new friends. Just like Needfest, Growfest, and Richfest, there are traditions for celebrating and a few customs practiced by those celebrating. For example, Hawaiian Shirt Day in honor of Gary's love of those shirts. Also, the auctioning of the "Sandal of Gygax"—the last example of Gary's work as a cobbler, enshrined in a shadowbox. The winner of the auction owns it for 365 days, and it is auctioned again the next year!

This issue invites you to think about Greyhawk culturally, making things like the seasonal festivals and events significant for your game. Whether it's a whole adventure themed for a holiday (like a Halloween one-shot), or even if it's just something in the background like *when* an adventure takes place, or celebrating actual festivals and having PCs participate in the festivities by playing games, enjoying special food, or seeing rare events. Sometimes, gaming groups will actually celebrate the in-game festivals or holidays by exchanging gifts between players. And it's not just Christmas! There's all kinds of holidays and festivals to enjoy!

And this month, Greyhawk Online is pleased to bring a simple gift to you—articles to use in your game, and have fun with your players and friends!

Because the authors for these articles all wanted to ...

"Create and Share, for the WORLD OF GREYHAWK"!

'Til the starbreak!

Kristoph Nolen
Editor-in-Chief



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A city viewed from the lower, common district, upwards toward the castle district. Reminiscent of what the Free City of Greyhawk might look like!
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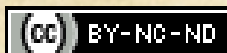
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FATHER TABOR'S GUIDE TO MIDSUMMER AND RICHFEST

A look at all customs all over the Flanaess

By Thomas Kelly

In honor of benevolent Merikka, our Lady of Changing of Seasons, I resolved to write an almanac collating the various calends and appointed times as celebrated and variously observed across the wide Flanaess. I pretend no firsthand knowledge far beyond the village of Orlane where I serve as cleric in our lady's holy house. Only rarely and reluctantly have I ventured beyond the borders of the March, but my listening ear has collected many tales from pilgrims and travelers. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of their reports, but I do my best to relate the customs and traditions (and the honor of the gods) according to our common calendar, established universally, as it is, by the predictable and constant changing faces of the blessed sister moons.

In the previous volume of this work, I have written at length on the order of the months and their names, their observances, the reckoning of the

seasons among the various peoples and how their climates dictate seedtime and harvest according to the wisdom of our Lady of Changing Seasons. In this volume, I order a description of the four festivals, beginning (in accordance with the Festival of First Fruits by Merikkan tradition) with the high summer festival of Richfest when the clusters weigh heavy on the vines and the grainfields wave golden-headed under the sun.

RICHFEST

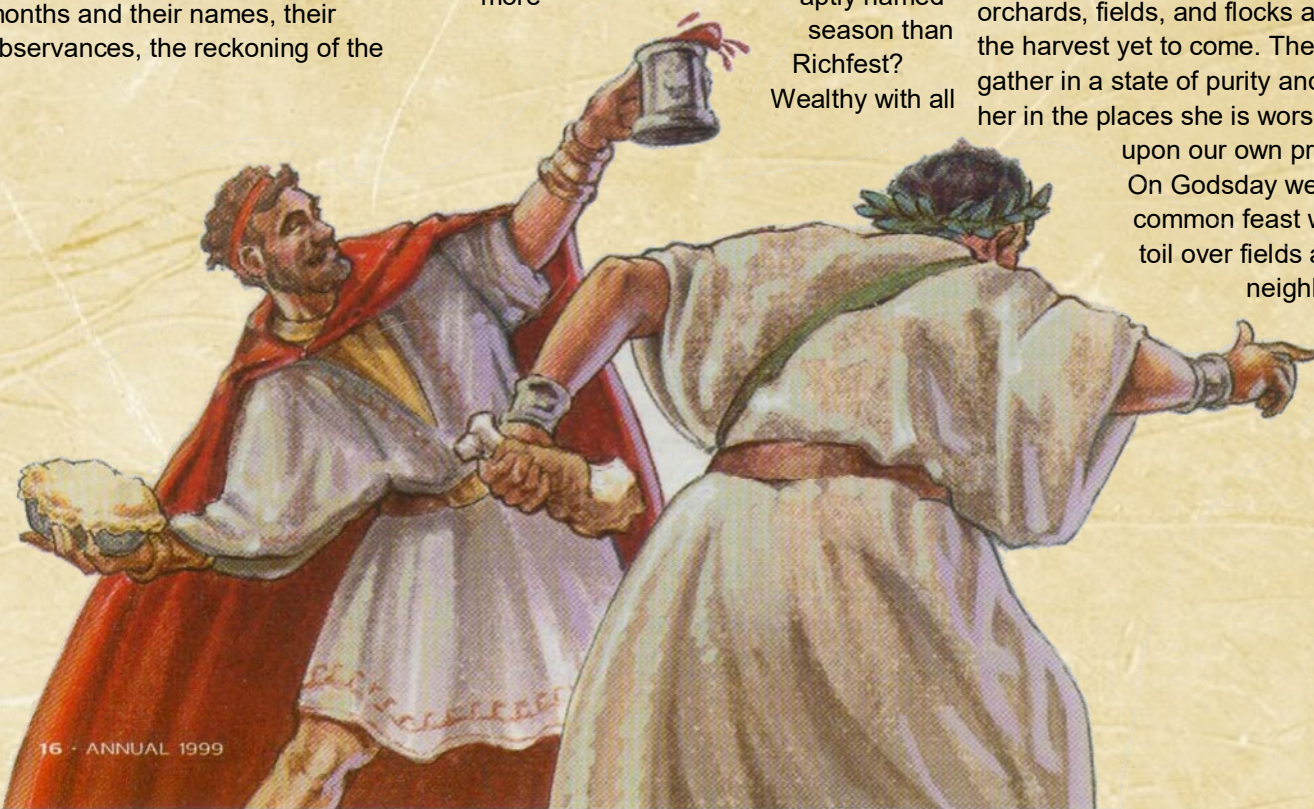
The seven days of Richfest celebrate the summer solstice. By divine cunning, the length of the days turn from waxing to waning as if upon a hinge with the fullness of both our moons on Midsummer Night (Richfest 4). This seven-day holy week comes nestled between the end of Wealsun and the beginning of Reaping. Was there ever a more

aptly named
season than
Richfest?
Wealthy with all

the produce of the soil, still in full blossom, now turning toward the promise of harvest, heavy-laden with abundance and bounty! For these seven longest days of the year, the summer sun smiles down upon various celebrations of mirth and good cheer, and by night, the sister moons show full pregnancy in the cool evening air. Surely all the wide world of Oerth observes Godsdays of the festival as Midsummer Night. Yet the observance of the festival is as varied and diverse as the peoples and places upon which the sisters shine their pale light.

RICHFEST AND THE OERIDIAN GODS

For those who observe *The Most Worshipful Guide to Benign Merikka*, the observance of Richfest calls for the offering of first fruits from vineyards, orchards, fields, and flocks as a token of the harvest yet to come. These we gather in a state of purity and set before her in the places she is worshipped or upon our own private altars. On Godsdays we share a common feast with all who toil over fields and farms, neighbors and laborers



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Art by Thomas Gianni

alike. Although Richfest marks a time of relaxed burdens, coming between planting and harvest as it does, only Godsdays are set aside from ordinary labors, for the *Worshipful Guide* censures idleness and frivolity during the summer months.

In any case, it is well understood among the pious that Richfest rightly belongs not to Merikka but to our lady's cousin Sotillion, goddess of summer and, by extension, to her husband, prosperous Zilchus the Guildmaster. In places where the civilized gods are yet revered, young girls compete to be named the Summer Queen in Sotillion's adoration while craftsmen proudly display their finest wares in honor of her husband. Sotillion and Zilchus personally attend to the festivities and judge the competitions, deciding upon the victors and bestowing blessings and divine laurels upon their names.

In honor of Summer Queen Sotillion, bards and actors, singers and poets, take their places upon innumerable stages across the Flanaess to offer their entertainments as gifts to the summer goddess. They compete with one another for her blessing. Meantime, maidens tie ribbons in their hair, attend Midsummer dances, and participate in many small rituals, seeking suitors and fertility, while young men compete in athletic games of prowess to catch the eyes of the girls.

In honor of wealthy Zilchus, the last two days of Richfest are dedicated to craft fairs at which artisans of various guilds compete for the esteem of customers

and colleagues. For example, it is well known that, in the Free City of Greyhawk, during Guild Days, a city of booths appears in the High Market where craftsmen display the very best jewelry, rugs, clothing, furs, sculptures, fine furniture, glassware, armor, weapons, tools, wagons, leather goods, and whatever skill they may have. The event draws visitors and considerable wealth from faraway lands. Traders and merchants from as far as Zeif attend. The craftsmen compete for the coveted Medal of Zagig which gives them the title of Master Artisan—all in honor of blessed Zilchus (may he prosper us all).

On Midsummer Night, the devout focus attention on Celestian, god of stars, heavenly bodies, and astrology. His devotees conduct a holy vigil through this shortest night of the year to read the signs and portents of the sky by which predictions of the future may be discerned. The height of Celestian's ceremonies occur when fullness of Celene converges overtop Luna at midnight, a circle within a circle.

The peaceful Raoans revere Midsummer Night as a remembrance of Rao's victory over the One Who Slumbers in Chains. They observe the bright sky of Midsummer Night in opposition to Dark Night, when both moons are concealed and the powers of evil wax most potent. For this reason, the servants of Rao hold the entire

festival in high esteem, and conduct various solemnities on Midsummer Night, especially in Veluna.

OTHER PANTHEONS

I'm ignorant as to most of the names and the ways of gods from other houses, but I am certain that many, if not most, enjoy some obeisance in connection with the days of Richfest and, especially, with Midsummer's Day. I have heard it said that the worshippers of Lydia, a Suel goddess of music, enlightenment, and daylight, name the festival "Brilliance Celebration" and that they feast in honor of light and knowledge on this day.

The Flanmen also pay homage to their gods during Richfest, especially unto Shining Pelor. Midsummer Day they name the Holy Day of Pelor. The saints of Pelor celebrate the longest sun-filled day of the year by renewing their vows and inducting new initiates into their orders. They conduct rites from dawn until noon, then serve a most beneficent Beggars' Feast for all who will come to their table—especially the poor and the needy. "The sun gives freely, and we do as well! A starving man is not a wise one," the priests of Pelor say as they distribute soup and bread to the masses. Those with endowed with the power of miraculous gifts of healing bestow their grace freely upon anyone in need. The wealthy class avoids the free meal and the healing boons, for

they know that the meal-without-cost comes with a cost. They will be hard pressed for donations to the church of Pelor. But the poor are well-treated and well-fed, and



the priests do not ask a single coin of them.

OLD FAITH

Among the peasantry and heathen folk of the Old Faith (like the Geoffmen among whom I have lived and the druids of Beory and Obad-Hi), the various sects set aside their squabbles to celebrate the so-called “Great Balance” they serve. In the rural places, as well in towns and villages, the young folk gather coin and wood and kindle summer-night bonfires, spending the nights winebibbing, dancing about the flames, leaping over the same, burning sundry herbs and flowers, and crooning in drunken revelry. The druids make Midsummer Day the holiest of all days, and Midsummer Night sacred of sacred. On that night, the druids cut mistletoe which they use throughout the year to cast their potent spells.

The scattered Flan throughout all lands observe the night as sacred, variously practicing ancient ceremonies to thank Beory for the bounty she has bestowed upon them. Even in civilized Oerdian lands, peasants yet pay their respects to the Old Faith by setting aside small portions for Beory, Oerth Mother, on Midsummer Night.

NON-HUMAN PANTHEONS

Even the gods of receive reverence during Richfest. In hobniz communities and shires, we celebrate Richfest as a full public holiday, with all the usual entertainments and merry making. We observe Misdummer Day as a High Godsday. Our various chapels conduct joint services lasting from dawn to dusk, with many breaks for food and music between.

The dwarves and the gnomes who make their lives beneath the earth pay the festival less esteem than surface dwellers, but even their priests mark the occasion with odd customs and calls for merriment. Dwarven bards recite their sagas during Richfest, and brewmasters seal kegs with blessings for success in anticipation of Brewfest to come.

Olvenfolk, who are already given to wandering dreamily beneath the nighttime summer sky, make an especially grand occasion of Richfest. The high elves of Celene conduct a Midsummer Night Ball (also called the Midsummer Frolic) in reverence for the Fae Mysteries inspired by their goddess of love and beauty, Hanali Celanil. Her worshippers regard every full moon holy—much more so on the Midsummer Night when lovers experience the full bloom of passion like that of the love between Sehanine and Larethian. The trees of Enstad are hung with lanterns, and all the forest blazes with light. Elves from many nations gather for the frolic, and all present revere her Fey Majesty as the Lady Rhalta, Queen of the Ball and Elvenkind.

Naturally, the night is also held sacred to Sehanine Moonbow, the Handmaiden and lady of the paler moon, and on that night, her Moonarch is said to appear. Moreover, the elves observe the fourth day of Richfest as the beginning of the holiday of Agelong, a commemoration of Correlon Larethian's battle with Gruumsh. The Agelong celebration extends all the way to the fifth of Growfest. During those days, the Wood elves, such as those that wander the paths of the Dim Forest, hunt orcs and goblins in honor of their lord's legendary battle with the cursed orc god. Similarly, rangers and druids throughout the Flanaess make the entire festival of Richfest a hunt for lycanthropes, for the double full-moon of Midsummer Night maddens the wear-blood—a matter of which I have some personal experience from my own adventuring years.

GREYHAWK CITY

I have already spoken some small amount regarding the celebration of the festival in the city of Greyhawk, and if you would know more of Richfest in the Free City, turn your eyes upon that most enlightening tome titled *The Adventure Doth Begin*. But if you would know of

how the festival is celebrated in other lands outside that great city, read on.

THE EAST AND GREAT KINGDOM

Through all the lands of the former Great Kingdom, wherever the rightful gods are yet revered, Richfest remains the center of summer and excuse for pious debauchery. In most places, the festival has forgotten its origin as a ritual appeasement of Sotillion for a mild summer, and it has sunk into a celebration of carousing and winebibbing as those once-civilized lands have fallen into barbary.

GLADIATOR GAMES IN AHLISSA

In the Kingdom of Ahlissa, the seven days of the festival involve gladiatorial games in the arenas. The populace of Kalstrand slakes their thirst for bloodsports every day of the festival, watching slaves hack each other to pieces or battle with fearsome beasts. Champions are not granted their freedom but are rather rewarded with food, wine, and women. Freemen can enter the arena to win a price of a thousand gold nightingales presented by the Overking.

In a less blood-soaked repast, Kalstrand's guildsmen don brightly colored costumes to compete against each other in the Game of Golden Staves. The object of the contest is for members of one team to carry a small golden ball across the goal line of the opposing team while balancing it at the end of a specially shaped ashwood club. (“Ahlissa: A Greyhawk Gazeteer,” *Oerth Journal* 16)

THE BURNING SHIPS OF AERDY

In the city of Eastfair in North Aerdy, the townsfolk still practice a ritual that hearkens back to their heathen roots. Before the festival begins, they build a full-scale barbarian sailing ship in the town square. They man the ship with a full crew of effigy sailors. On Midsummer Night, Aeradians dressed up as their barbarian forbears surround the ship with blazing torches and set it ablaze. The ritual symbolizes death and rebirth and the passage souls sailing

between worlds. While the ship burns, ale flows and street vendors sell pork and goat's meat sausages to the drunken rabble. (*Ivid the Undying*).

ONN WAL AND THE PEARL OF LONGBRIDGE

In the beleaguered state of Onnwal, civilized ways are better retained. A young maiden is proclaimed "Pearl of Longbridge" in honor of Sotillon the Lady of Summer on the first day of the seven. But in that place, only Godsdays and Midsummer Night are observed as actual holiday from labor. Meanwhile, the Flan of the Onnwal Headlands practice their ancient rites through the festival. Astrologers study the sky for portents of the future. (LG *The Free State of Onnwal; Longbridge at a Glance*).

URNST: THE CULT OF SYRUL IN LEUKISH

In the city of Leukish, the city's many inns and boarding houses fill with celebrants and merchants who come for the festivities. The ordinary solemnities are perfunctorily observed, but the festival is also revered by those who relish malice and darkness—both in the County and the Duchy of Urnst. The wicked cult of Syrul is known to celebrate the festival with their own unholy rites, including human sacrifices on Midsummer Night offered up to their lying goddess. May the gods of good and right protect us all! (LG URD3-04)

DOMAIN OF GREYHAWK

In the environs of Greyhawk, extending from Nyr Dyv to Wooly Bay, Richfest is held in high esteem. It's celebration has been influenced by the fair in Greyhawk City which is considered a pilgrimage center for the festival. The Free City's custom of Guild Days has taken hold in towns small and large, making Richfest 6-7 days of competition, judging, and exhibition for the merchant and artisan guilds.



ELMSHIRE: FISH FRY AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

The halflings of Elmsshire set aside the full seven days for entertainment, parties, and community festivities. Musicians and singers prepare their performances long in advance. On Godsdays all the religious leaders in Elmsshire conduct joint worship services. The last day of the festival features a fishing contest and fish fry. (*Adventure Begins*)

NARWELL: FOUNDATION DAY PARADES AND STREET FIGHTS

Narwell marks Midsummer Day as "Foundation Day" with a town-wide parade by Greyhawk Militia soldiers and plenty of music. The festive spirit scarcely conceals the tensions. Foundation Day (which honors the town's founding around a blessed spring a century past) has earned a bad reputation for riotous behavior, street fights, and hateful bigotry fueled by plenty of drinking. (*Adventure Begins*)

HARDBY: CARAVAN TO GREYHAWK

Richfest is scarcely celebrated in Hardby. Instead, a caravan of revelers, merchants, artisans, and farmers makes pilgrimage up the River Road and the Selintan to Greyhawk. The Hardby caravan earns considerable coin during their trek, not just in Greyhawk, but by setting up a local fair and carnival bazaar at every stop along the way. Merchants from smaller villages join the caravan as it travels, and a great throng arrives in Greyhawk by the time Richfest begins. ("The City of Hardby," *Oerth Journal* 10)

SAFETON: THE SUMMER QUEEN ON THE WILD COAST

In the environs of Greyhawk along the Wild Coast, villages erect stages and booths for the celebration, and craftsmen put out their best wares or send them by caravan to Greyhawk or Safeton. In most villages, a pole with a gilded glass orb representing Pelor the Sun Father is erected at the center of the village squares. Young girls dressed in costumes of the Summer Queen untie ribbons from the pole and drape them on a lad designated to represent Sotillon's spouse Zilchus. Young boys not yet of age dress themselves as winged orange tigers: servants of the Summer Queen. (LG COR7-14)

THE MARKLANDS AND YATILS

Furyundy, Shieldlands, and Nyrond all honor Sotillon the Summer Queen according to the ordinary customs of Richfest, but since the Greyhawk Wars, both Rao and Pelor have obtained more adherents, and heathen Flan customs have found resurgence among the common folk. The Greyhawk custom of Guild Days has not taken hold in the Marklands. All the markets in the Markland towns bustle with activity during the festival, but merchants close their shops early so that the festivities can commence and extend late into each night. The festival offers a time of relaxation after long months of work in the fields. Most of the northlands celebrate the festival with some type of heroic tests, races, or athletic competitions. Knights joust in tournaments, and heroes undertake quests. Midsummer Night has taken on extra significance in opposition to the servants of luz who revere the Dark Night of Goodmonth 11 as the night when the Slumbering One stirs. Midsummer Night is especially revered in Veluna, especially since the Crook of Rao has been raised.

HIGHFOLK: RACE OF HEROES IN HIGHFOLK

In the city of Highfolk, the town is awash with visitors from the countryside and

Art by Thomas Gianni

beyond at Richfest. The taverns are packed elbow to elbow for the celebration and for the Race of Heroes. Young heroes form teams that head into the Vesve to retrieve a bushel of llymirth berries, an essential ingredient in the harvest wines, and bring them back to Highfolk as quickly as possible to begin the vinting. The Race of Heroes begins on Freeday, the last day of Richfest at the Gilded Cow Tavern. (LG HIG1-01)

VERBEEG HILL: RICHFEST FROG RACES

Richfest in Verbeeg Hill is a seven-day fair. Vendors hawk fresh produce and salted eel jelly; barkers announce festival events. The whole town, and especially the market, is decorated with bright banners. The day's work is completed by mid-day, leaving the rest of the day and evening for celebration—including plenty of storytelling over draughts of vintage illmyrthwines. Local miners, farmers, and laborers compete in various contests including a celebrated frog race at swampside track featuring the best hoppers of Flanaess. (Giant frogs are not allowed to compete.) Clerics of Norebo accept wagers up to 25 gold pieces for those who wish to bet upon a favorite frog. (LG HIG4-04)

PERRENLAND: THE SINGING WOODS OF KERSHANE PASS

The celebration of Richfest in Perrenland involves the burning of effigies of the Witch Queen (may her memory be blotted out). It is also said

that, every year on the night of the summer solstice, that the haunted wood of Kershane can be heard to sing beneath the double moon. Those who have heard the sound tell of a haunting yet beautiful melody lifted into the air by a multitude of unrecognizable voices. Bards make pilgrimage to hear the song, and those privileged to hear the it attempt to learn its tune and decipher its meaning. None have succeeded. Some believe the voices belong to the dead souls of the wood lamenting their end. (LG PER3-01)

BISSEL: ELEMENTAL BINDINGS ON MIDSUMMER NIGHT

In the March of Bissel, Richfest is celebrated according to the usual Oredian fashion, but the heathen druids of the Way of the Root gather in the grove of Gullen Drae to perform a ritual known as the Elemental Binding. On Midsummer Night, they perform a pagan rite to summon and bind the fundamental forces of nature to serve them. (LG: *Bissel Omnibus*)

SHELDOMAR VALLEY

I can speak with more authority on those celebrations closer to home. I am a native of Geoff, hailing from the shire at Pregmere, but I have lived most of my life in Hochoch and Orlane, in devotion to benevolent Merikka. I have travelled as far north as the Vale of the Mage and as far south as Niole Dra. I am familiar with Richfest as it is celebrated through the whole Sheldomar Valley and also into the Ulek States where it is primarily a observed as a week for poets and bards to recite their poems and sagas or, among the druids of the county, according to the rituals of the Old Faith already described.

GRANMARCH: MUSTERING DAY

Here in the Granmarch, the first day of Richfest is known as Mustering

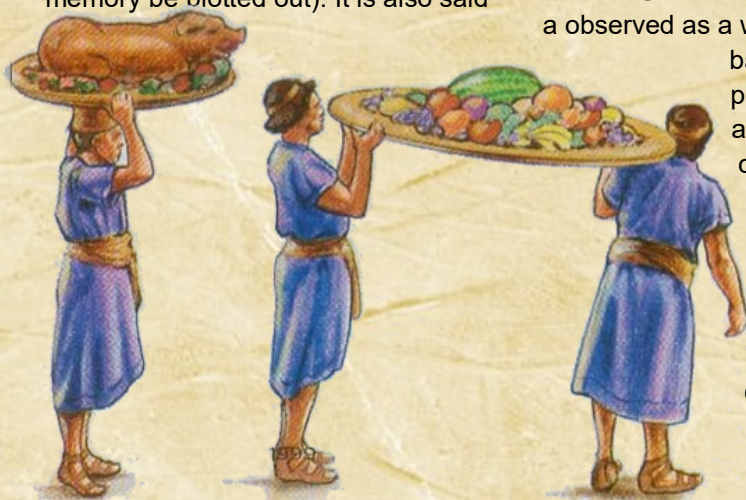
Day. New recruits are inducted and assigned to their units for basic training, but actual training begins a month later on the first of Reaping. Those who have completed their term (usually three years) are released from service on Mustering Day. The effect of this is to make Richfest a time for wild parties as some celebrate their newfound civilian life while others enjoy one last night before mandatory service begins. The general muster takes place in three locations: Hookhill, Shibolet, and my own town of Orlane. (LG GRM5-07, Gran March Military)

GEOFF: GREEN MAN FAIRS AND WATERDAY BONFIRE

In my homeland of Geoff, the heathen Flan dress in bright colors and wear symbols of the Old Faith: Pelor, Beory, Ehlonna, Obad-Hai the Green Man, and even Nerull. The seven days involve archery competitions, sparring circles, and contests of skill and combat. Vendors sell honey mead, breads, vegetables, cheeses, and other wonderful foods. By night, the Flanmen make bonfires within their sacred rings of standing stones and indulge in their heathen druidish rites. (LG GEO3-03)

Since the coming of the giants, however, the festival has been muted. Who can say how it is observed in the occupied lands? Do the giants celebrate Richfest? The thought of their revelries makes me shudder!

The refugees of Geoff carry on in the liberated city of Hochoch, but the Marshall has forbidden large gatherings and the consumption of alcohol within the city walls lest revelry lead to insurrection. The only exception to the rule takes place on the Richfest night of Waterday when a large bonfire is conducted in the town amphitheater. At that event, the spirits flow and Geoffite bards recite the sighing sagas of our fallen land. (LG GEO-104)



KEOLAND: CATHEDRAL OF DELIGHT AND CARNIVAL OF THE AZURE

In ancient Keoland, Richfest is especially revered with pageants and poetry as the festival of the Summer Queen. Sotillion's worshippers make pilgrimage to the city of Niole Dra, for her grandest temple, the Cathedral of Delight, stands within its walls. I personally have made the pilgrimage for Richfest and joined the happy throng. The interior of the octagonal Temple is washed with dazzling colored sunlight that filters through stained glass windows of enormous size. A grand marble statue of the goddess, depicting her asleep on a couch, dominates the temple, and on Midsummer Night, the light of the two moons illuminate her. However, in the city of Gradsul the festival takes on a different character. In that place, it is celebrated as the Carnival of the Azure, and the celebrations have a Suelish flavor and maritime concerns.

YEOMANRY: GOLDENFIELDS FESTIVAL IN THE MEADOWS

Yeomanry celebrates Richfest as the Goldenfields Festival, one of four festivals of the arts. The Goldfields Festival features live entertainment, music, and drama. Thousands gather for the events and shower accolades upon the winning artists. The festival takes place upon common grounds in Yeomanry cities, typically called the Meadow. In the Meadows, old friends meet and catch up with the latest gossip from across the country and beyond while enjoying the shows. (LG *Players Guide to the Yeomanry*)

THE BAKLUNISH WEST

I am largely ignorant of the lands beyond the Barrier Peaks and Yatils. I know how the Bakluni revere Istus, Queen of Fates, but the names of their gods and their proper obeisance are as foreign to me as the names of their many tribes. The festival is not called "Richfest" in those lands: the Paynim call it Naajam and the men of Zeif have yet another name for it. Though my knowledge of the west is sparse, I have collected some tales from travelers passing through Orlane, and I possess a rare volume titled *The Wonders of Ull*.

KET: THE BAZAAR IN NURDJELLA

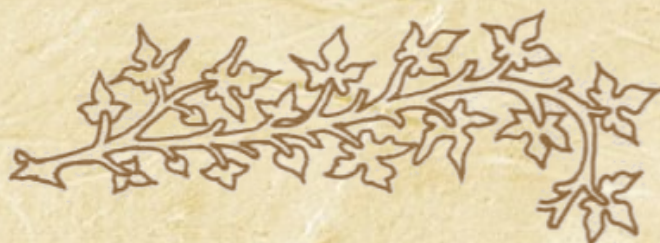
A Bakluni merchant once told me of how the city of Lopolla competes with the village of Nurdjella for Richfest pilgrims, but the Northern Merchant families choose to follow their ancient custom and gather in remote Nurdjella to celebrate the festival. The whole village is transformed every year as its population swells from hundreds to thousands.

Pilgrims enter the town through a brightly painted three-spined festival gate adorned with carvings, holy symbols and decorations, and painted in wild slashes and spirals of bright, vibrant colors. Elaborate stages are erected near the Shrine of Istus for puppeteers, singers, and dancers who compete before cheering crowds. Permanent structures in the village receive fresh pain and adornment. Multi-hued tents and pavilions appear and spread throughout the village. Highlights of the festival include an annual horse race, fortune telling, storytelling, Baklunish singing and dancing (gender-separated

for modesty's sake), and delicious feasts of curried lamb with plenty of fermented mare's milk to wash it down. No Ketite celebration is complete without a horse race of some form, and in Nurdjella, the race takes place on Godsday. (LG KETI3-03)

ULL: NAAJAM FESTIVAL OF THE PAYNIMS

The untamed city of Ulakand celebrates the Paynim summer festival of Naajam during the week we call Richfest. Ulakand's size doubles as tents spring up around the mesa and horse lords parade their herds through town. The folk adorn themselves in their most colorful garments. Singers and dancers perform, and storytellers embellish traditional tales of Ull. Horsemen, from those just old enough to sit in the saddle to the most seasoned of Ull's warriors, daily display their skills on horseback for the festival crowds, attempting to unhorse rival riders, performing stunts, feats of prowess, and astonishing marksmanship by mounted archery. The festival culminates in the deadly cross-country Naajam Trials, a highly competitive horse race that attracts the best riders and horse breeders from across the Baklunish West. It's considered an achievement merely to survive the dangerous race, which lasts for several days and winds its way along mountains and tracks through ogre lands. The winner is declared "Leader of a Thousand Horses." (*The Wonders of Ull*)



THE BEERS OF THE FLANAESS



A selection of brews from all over the Flanaess!

By James A. S. Muldowney III, M.D.

"So here we were sitting in the Pub of Vecna, which for Dorakka, is a rather nice establishment. We had just snuck across the front lines past luz's forces and were trying to keep as low a profile as possible for a party with three paladins. The priests were able to cloak them, but that night in Dorakka all but blew our cover. Frighteningly enough, the whole incident was caused by a little waif of a sorceress who had a taste for good beer.

We were being served by a waiter who was a Velunian spy attempting to make contact with us. Chispa requested a Rauxian Porter, and was served a Velunian ale, a drink not normally available in Dorakaa, but smuggled in small quantity by this spy because Velunian Military Intelligence (namely, Rebecca of the Order of the Spear, our contact with them) knew this would be the best and most subtle way of contacting us. Unfortunately, somebody forgot to tell Chispa. After she flattened the waiter with a push spell, she destroyed all of the casks behind the bar with a lightning bolt because this gentleman attempted to pass skunked ale for a Rauxian porter. Fortunately, we all survived to tell this story..."

from *The Companions of Chendl* by Keldreth Scaramanthon

Foreword

Before I discuss the better potables of the Flanaess, I must say, in my defense, that Keldreth has a completely skewed view of the situation. First of all, I was not informed that a misordered beer was how contact would be made. While I realize that doppelganger spies were following us and information was on a need-to-know basis, my tastebuds would have preferred something more subtle than an ale which does not travel well. Velunian Stone Mead would have been a far better choice in that it does not skunk over time and with heat. In fact, it is best served at room temperature. Second of all, Akazon, Regimus and I were tired of sneaking around that pit that doubled for a city,

and well, the locals needed to know that we were not a group to be trifled with. With that said in my defense, I will go on to discuss my favorite brews.

My taste for brews began as child. My mother, Milagra, was a brewer of potions for her magic shop, and on the side made a delightful spiced ale. It was my job to find a rare breed of wild hops that grew near the forests outside of Chendl. My mother taught me the art of roasting barley and the other grains so as to bring out the richest flavors. Then there was the balance of spices she added. Most were local in origin, but there were bark extracts from the Lands of the Tree in the Vesve Forest, and a root from a plant which she obtained from a very powerful wizard from Geoff, which he claims to have found in an indoor garden in a cave behind a metal door the Barrier Peaks. After I entered the Chendl School of Magic, I put both my mother's brewing skills and my excellent tastebuds to good use. Other students were concocting mnemonic enhancers, potions of translucency and warrior strength, dust of color change and other basic potions in order to fulfill our alchemy requirement. I, on the other hand, used the opportunity to perfect my own mead. Granted it was something more useful after examinations than before, but schoolwork was never my trademark during my years at the Chendl School of Magic. Nevertheless, before I ramble further, here is a small treatise on some of the finer potables in the Flanaess.

MILAGRA'S SPICED ALE

I have to start with my mother's brew. This honeyed drink is quite popular with the magi community in Chendl. It has a pungent nutty aroma and is more sweet than bitter. The bark of bronzedwood trees from the Vesve and a rare root from the Barrier Peaks are its main spices, nutmeg, allspice and cinnamon also have their role in the flavor. It has an amber color and is a perfect clarity. My mother would spice the mead as it was fermenting and then strain it

through the finest Baklunish cloth, under the pressure of an air fundamental summoned by my father. While it has only a mild intoxicating effect, it keeps very well and tastes delightful either piping hot, or chilled.

RAUXIAN PORTER - This is my favorite drink. While my dear friend Mirago, now Dean of the Chendl School of Magic, was finishing his Phantasmagoria Phellowship, the now legendary knight, Regimus and I traveled to Rauxes to obtain the brain of an Ixitachitl for my father's research. We found a tavern called the Desiccated Dragon, or something like that and I said to the barmaid, "Barmaid, give me something that is unique to the Great Kingdom," and there we were. This porter is made from a very dark roasted barley. It is not burnt, but actually has a very light feel for a porter of its caliber. Furthermore, it is not too hoppy as that would distract from its taste. It is the drink for one who likes the taste of a dark beer but does want the heaviness associated with it.

VELUNIAN ALE - This pale ale has to be quite possibly the worst ale in the Flanaess and if you are ever in Veluna, do not drink **domestic!** We would drink this in Magic School after our examinations as it was the cheapest import around. Well, let me rephrase that, *my classmates* would drink it. I would bring a cask of my mother's mead to the festivities. This ale is bitter to the point of sourness with hops, and furthermore it tastes as if it were deliberately allowed to go bad. It does, though, have a nice ruddy hue, and if served extremely (read magically) cold, it can be put down if nothing else is available.

ULEKIAN ALE - This ale has a red hue and is delightfully bitter. While the grains dominate the flavor of the Ulekian Stout, this drink has two flavors, one is the hops, and the other is a subtle grassy aftertaste which maybe revolting to some, but is in my

opinion, the highlight of this drink.

ULEKIAN STOUT - This is one of the finest beverages in the Flanness. This dark drink is rather creamy and thick. My friend Keldreth once described it as drinking bread, but what does a grey elf know about beer anyway. It balances dark roasted grains with a subtle hoppiness. It has a very thick head and when floated on top of Ulekian Ale, it makes a delicious drink.

CELENIAN BOCQUE - This drink is like more of a sherry than a beer, but since it is derived from grain, I bring include it. The elves, who are more of a wine sipping bunch anyway, created this drink from all of the Ulekian Stout that their dwarven compatriots in the war sent to them as a gift for their aid. It tastes like a caramelized sherry, instead of the fruity taste associated with most sherry's, this has something of a smoked taste. But it is very subtle, and delicious. As it is a fortified spirit, one can get rather intoxicated from this drink, so be cautious.

FURYONDIAN SPICED ALE - Another staple during my schooling (it is a wonder that I graduated), this drink is a fine well-balanced ale with a host of subtle spices including one reportedly from Aquaria which does not have a taste but causes a tingling on your tongue. It makes this drink both expensive and unique.

DORAKKAN BLACKENED BEER - This drink is notable for the sediment it leaves in the bottom of the glass. Its taste is light and yeasty, but rather hot. The drink has no clarity as it is fermented inside the charred skulls of fire giants and the sediment is suspended within the beverage. But there is something about the

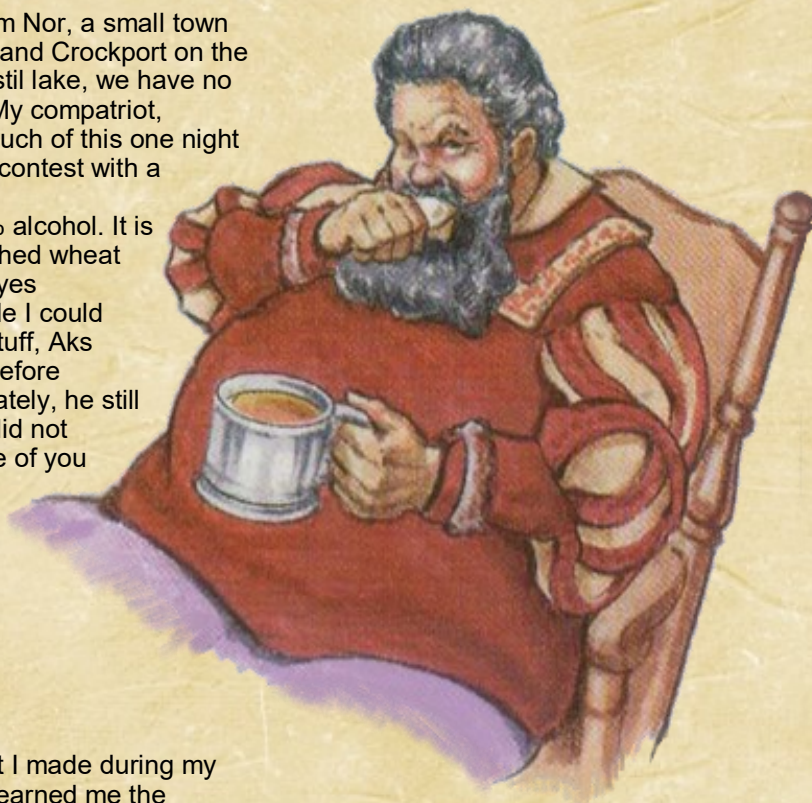
combination of grains and spices which make this drink both unique and delightful. It is worth the trip to Dorakaa to try it.

NORIAN FIREWATER - While this drink is not originally from Nor, a small town between Grabford and Crockport on the coast of the Whyestil lake, we have no other name for it. My compatriot, Akazon, had too much of this one night while in a drinking contest with a dwarf. This drink is approximately 55% alcohol. It is brewed from scorched wheat and peppercorns (yes peppercorns). While I could not put down the stuff, Aks drank three pints before flinching. Unfortunately, he still lost, as the dwarf did not flinch. But for those of you out for something different, this may be the drink for you, if you can find it.

CHISPA'S SPRING WHEAT BEER -

This is the one that I made during my training; this drink earned me the highest grade in alchemy by my professors. So, let the record show that I wasn't completely unappreciated at the Chendl School of Magic. I used a Burning Hands spell to flash roast the wheat (unfortunately, I flash roasted a section of the library in the process of learning the spell). I used a rare species of yeast that my mother received from a seller in Dyvers. I also used a raw hop to bring in a slightly bitter grassy taste, much like that found Ulekian ale. After fermenting, I added honey, nutmeg and allspice. This drink has a sweet yet grassy taste with a hint of spice. I keep a few casks of it in my tower and have shared the recipe with

some brewers in Chendl. They still need me to roast the wheat since I now use a unique coldfire variant of Burning Hands to roast them nowadays for an improved, cleaner flavor. If you are in town, look for it.



This is only a brief treatise on the beers of the Flanaess, the highlights of what I have encountered in my travels. There are probably others equally outstanding that I have yet to find.

—Chispa Alicante, the Spellspinner of Chendl



RICHFEST IN CHATHOLD



Daily customs throughout the festival!

By Sam Dillon

"There's nothin' like Richfest in Chathold! It's a party rain or shine. A different party, depending, but a party nonetheless. Some people like the rainside better, but I always enjoy the comfort of Sotillion's gaze. The hospitality can't be beat and the prices are low! You wanna make fast friends, that's the place to be. Be sure to bring your rain mask, just in case the mood is Trithereon's. And don't forget to silver your dagger." - Tarnen Dunner, Guildmaster of the Copper Mongers and Master of Richfest 574 CY

Richfest is a glorious holiday and a favored celebration across the Flannaes. This is especially true in Chathold, the capital of Almor. The city hosts a festival of incomparable delight that is known far and wide for its amazing acrobatic troupes, abundant feasts, and pyrotechnic sculptures. The city exhibits unparalleled generosity and hospitality for the week, providing an unforgettable experience.

With Richfest looming, the Chathold markets are overcrowded with residents and visitors alike, seeking their favorite fruit, a fine goose, new leatherwork, or the right piece of cloth to finish their masks. Folks come to Chathold from all over Almor and the surrounding regions. Caravans often travel from Mithat, Innspa, Jalpa, and Prymp to revel in the Richfest celebration. Sometimes a contingent travels from as far away as Rel Mord, Leukish, or Scant. In 567 CY a caravan traveling to Innspa from the east convinced a rock gnome from the Flinty Hills that Richfest in Chathold is an event worthy of gnomish enjoyment. That year, and every year thereafter, a raucous group of gnomes travel leagues from the Flinty Hills to visit Chathold and see the spectacle of Richfest firsthand. In recent years the gnomes have been welcomed to participate in the revelry and have become known for producing the most convincing masks.

Richfest in Chathold has a tradition of celebrating two prominent deities, Trithereon and Sotillion. Almorian citizens have always had a streak of individualism and an appreciation of

freedom, making Trithereon a favored God for many. Oeridian origins and customs haven't been lost in Chathold and Sotillion is celebrated as she brings great hope for comfort and an easy life.

This dual focus in Richfest leads those taking part in the midsummer parade and ball to create celebratory masks to wear. Two masks, one representing Trithereon and one representing Sotillion, are made every year. The appropriate one to wear each year is determined by presence or absence of rain on the Day of Respite (Moonday, Richfest 3). Whether rainside or sunside wins midsummer, Richfest is always capped with a feast to remember.

Each day of Richfest brings a new event and celebration, detailed below.

STAR DAY, RICHFEST 1 — KEY DAY

This is a day of welcoming, with large markets and low prices. All of Chathold is abuzz with the surge of visitors. Priests of Sotillion gather at the Harp Gate and parade through town. They wear vestments of bright yellow and carry bundles of wheat. The high priest is carried on a posh litter and as a crowd begins to form along the The Golden Way, the priest drops copper pieces for the followers to claim. As they parade through the street city folk in bright yellow plaids follow behind, dancing and singing the praises of the summer Goddess and the bounty she provides. Drums sound from the watchtowers and atop the city walls. By the time the procession reaches the docks in Relmor Bay, most of the city has streamed into the streets. In a nod to Procan, father of Sotillion, flowers, salt, and other offerings to the Sea God are put on the large leaves of the Deklo tree and floated out into the bay.

The parade ends with the Copper Ceremony, in which the Prelate presents a copper key to the Master of Richfest. The Master uses the copper key to open a large chest. Half of the chest contains copper coins which are thrown into the crowd and given to small children and the elderly. The other half of the chest contains gems and

valuables which are promptly auctioned off to the highest bidder. The auction has two restrictions; bids must be in copper coin and no one of merchant standing or higher can bid. After the copper auction is complete, revelers party on the docks all night.

SUNDAY, RICHFEST 2 — MERCHANT'S DAY

This is the last day the selling of goods is legal until Richfest 7. On Merchant's Day the markets are packed full and shops are bursting with patrons. The prices of goods on this day are the lowest of the year and merchants and artisans often run out of merchandise. Deals struck on this day are considered blessed by Trithereon and reneging on a contract signed on Merchant's Day is considered a high offense in Chathold.

At sundown citizens gather on the Wide Way and in the plazas to watch a display of pyrotechnics so complex and entertaining that even visitors from Greyhawk and Rauxes are left in awe. A group of alchemists referred to as the Lord's Alchemist Society puts on a light and fire show on Whisper Hill. Complex mixtures of ingredients are prepared and applied to various substrates and ejected into the air. A long, thin fuse is lit and the sky lights up in a show of animal forms and explosions. The light show often tells an origin story of Trithereon or Sotillion, along with a few of their exploits. The most popular displays feature a falcon and hound, honoring two of Trithereon's well-known companions, Nemoud and Harrus. The pyrotechnics display ends with the alchemists passing a long, torch-like polearm with a burning firework on the end to the Master of Richfest. The Master then assists those around him in lighting their pyrotechnic poles with his own and they in-turn light those around them. The pyro-bearers parade through the streets lighting torches as they go, eventually making their way to the Yellow Cathedral, a house of worship devoted to Sotillion, where they plant any still burning poles into the ground around the perimeter of the building, lighting it up in darkest night.

MOONDAY, RICHFEST 3 — DAY OF RESPITE

Richfest 3 is spent helping others become comfortable. If it does not rain, everyone in town does something for someone else on the Day of Respite. Folks from the Garden Ward move through the streets clearing drains, replacing cobbles, and generally working to maintain the thoroughfares. The Woodmakers Guild sends out teams of craftsmen to repair damaged buildings and leaky roofs. All citizens help clean up from the past two days of events. The Yellow Cathedral, surrounded and aglow with alchemical fire the night before, opens its doors and feeds all comers. Although all shops are now closed, the taverns are open and drinks are half price. This is the day which determines whether the midsummer party will be rainside or sunside. Typically (about 80% of the time) it is sunny on Richfest 3.

If it rains on Moonday it is a true day of respite. Most revelers stay indoors in comfortable temperatures and lots to eat and drink. Large tents are put up in Village Square, The Downs, and Cranden Plaza, allowing elders to regale the crowd with tales of early Almor, the good ol' days of the Great Kingdom, and the drive for Almorian independence. Taverns are still open and those who do not gather at the tents are treated to humorous tales, bardic poems, and various other forms of entertainment. Rain past noon on the Day of Respite has the High Priest of Sotillion declare this year's festival a rainside celebration. Many people spend their afternoon putting finishing touches on the appropriate mask for this year's midsummer festival.

GODSDAY, RICHFEST 4 — MIDSUMMER, SUNSIDE OR RAINSIDE

This day begins with quiet worship in the morning as preparation for the evening's raucous festival. On this day, the longest of the year, both Luna and Celene are full in the sky and visible from early afternoon. Once the moons are visible an invitation-only ball is held in the Prelate's Manor. Those of merchant class or above usually find themselves invited to the Copper Mongers Guild Hall for a ball of their own. Those of lower class usually gather at the main warehouse of the Furrower's Order and have a dance

event of their own. At sunset the balls are over, everyone dons a mask, and the midsummer festival begins.

Sunside and rainside celebrations have a lot in common; both feature an enormous parade of masked revelers taking to the streets and loudly proclaiming their adoration for either Sotillion (sunside) or Trithereon (rainside). The two festivals have wholly different tones, however, as described below:

Sunside features bright masks of yellow, orange, bright blue, and light green, often trimmed with gold. Smiling faces and friendly looking animals adorn masks and heavily beaded gowns and costumes, and loud, percussive music permeates the night. People remove beads from their costumes and trade them to others in order to make long, multicolored necklaces of indeterminant value. Large orange tigers created by multiple people connecting their costumes together run through the streets, sometimes bearing wings and jumping off low roofs. Everyone places chairs outside their homes and along the plazas so that those wishing to sit in comfort for a moment may do so. Bright torches are abundant, placed at every city gate, intersection, and plaza, with guard patrols having at least two torches each as well. This is a celebration of the sun and life's easy days, so fighting is looked upon poorly, with guards taking swift action against anyone being aggressive or threatening harm to another. Chathold during sunside festivities is generally a safe and happy place.

Rainside is like a dark reflection of sunside, featuring dark masks of grey, dark blue, or purple, often trimmed with silver. The snarling faces of wolves, gnolls, and boars adorn the masks and heavily beaded gowns and costumes. Loud strangled music, reminiscent of howls or screams permeates the night. Guard patrols wear masks with the visage of Namoud the Hound and Ca'rolk the Sea Lizard. Large falcon costumes created and formed by multiple people run through the streets flapping their constructed wings and preaching safety against the dark. Bead exchange still occurs, but hey are darker, more flattened beads as opposed to the bright rounded ones seen on sunside costumes. Bright torches are found only at the city gates and the plazas. This is a celebration of

the protection and independence of Trithereon, and also a warning to stay vigilant against the lycanthropic powers - as both moons are in full this night, extra precaution should be taken against raging and rabid werewolves driven mad by the moon's sway. As a result, masked revelers often decorate their equipment with silver, and some even carry silvered daggers concealed within their costumes. After midnight the upper districts of Chathold are alive with activity as masked citizens flood Cranden Plaza, Highstone, and the Upper Way to gather food and copper from the wealthy citizens in those areas who dole out the goods in small amounts until they tire of the costumes and revelry and retire for the evening. Chathold during rainside festivities is generally not as safe as sunside and tends to end shortly after the gathering time, with only a small percentage of revelers staying in the streets.

WATERDAY, RICHFEST 5 — FEAST OF DAYS

The previous day's frenetic pace is replaced with a more languid, leisurely day of feasting and laughter. Enormous feasts are held in Village Square, The Downs, and Cranden Plaza. Priests of Sotillion and Trithereon permeate the crowd, offering blessings and ensuring that everyone has enjoyed the celebrations of Richfest so far. Though the feasts are free to attend the priests attempt to gather a donation whenever possible. The Copper Mongers Guild and the Furrower's Order often donate all the food for the feast days to display good will toward the city and the Prelate. The evening is low key, with most hosting private celebrations that rarely tumble out into the streets.

EARTHDAY, RICHFEST 6 — DAY OF PERFORMANCE

The 6th day of Richfest sees the citizens crowding into a makeshift pavilion and carnival. In recent years the jamboree has grown so large that it has been moved just outside the South Gate. This area now features several large tents and an outdoor theater. The day begins with an early theater troupe performing short skits to entertain the growing audience. The first half of the day is a time for amateur performers to delight the crowd and supplicate themselves to Sotillion, Trithereon, or both. Small

booths sell exotic foods and wine tasting, ale tasting, and pie eating contests dominate the morning and afternoon. Copper blocks are set out and a sculpting competition ensues; the winner is the best sculp of Freedom's Tongue, Trithereon's sword. The winning sculpt gets installed in front of an important building in town, or in one of the public plazas.

Knife and axe throwing competitions, as well as strongman contests, are also hosted throughout the day. The competitions are a mix between raffle and lottery. The inexpensive tickets cost 1 copper per entry and the prize is sometimes a sack of gold. An individual can purchase as many tickets as they like, but they are not told the total number of tickets available beforehand. All tickets are sold and then only 5% of that number are drawn. Those drawn enter the competition and the winner takes home the pot of coppers and bragging rights for an entire year.

The main event of the evening is an

acrobatics show featuring high-wire acts, contortion specialists, and magical trickery. High flying performers wow the crowd with their death-defying feats. Recently, the Lord's Alchemical Society has been working with the acrobats to make their show flashy and more dangerous. The crowd now sees the acrobats do everything they did in previous years, but now the equipment is on fire or explodes at random intervals. Every year the acrobats attempt to make an ever-larger living pyramid, asking for volunteers from the crowd to be intertwined with the bottom layer. The pyramid routinely contains 6 levels, 42 people, and reaches higher than Whisper Hill. The Flinty Gnomes have taken to challenging the acrobats in seeing who can make their pyramid faster.

FREEDAY, RICHFEST 7 — DAY OF FAREWELLS

The final day of Richfest is a day to give thanks for the celebration and say

goodbye to old and new friends. Shops and markets are open again, visitors are preparing to leave town, and revelers can get their bead exchange necklaces appraised by the lapidary and moneychanger. Sometimes a celebrant gets a surprise and learns that one of the beads on their necklace is a gem worth more than 50 gp.

At high-sun a procession starts on the docks, beginning where the parade ended on Key Day. Heading the procession are the High Priests of Trithereon and Sotillion. After a short speech and a blessing from each priest, they lead the citizens through town, eventually splitting off to go toward the Temple of Trithereon or the Yellow Cathedral. At the point where the crowd reaches the holy houses, the parade has ended and official Richfest events are ended.

Notes from the author ---

I took liberties with describing parts of Chathold since there is no official published guide to the city. Here is a glossary for those terms:

Chathold Districts Mentioned:

Cranden Plaza: Features an open plaza that contains the manors of the prelate and offices and meeting spaces of government officials. Manors and Estates of noble citizens are in this district.

Highstone: District that contains Whisper Hill, and also housing and businesses for the well-off.

The Downs: Area that includes the docks, relatively low-class housing area.

Village Square: Area that contains the open markets and several shops. Housing in this district is middle class.

Garden Ward: Middle to low class housing area. Includes houses for landowners (but not necessarily farmers).

Harp Quarter: District on the east side of town, closest to the Harp River. This district is bisected by the Golden Way and housing is low class on the south side and middle to upper class on the north side.

Notable Streets and Gates Mentioned:

The Upper Way: Main street that connects Cranden Plaza,

Highstone, and the northern-most area of Harp Quarter.

South Gate: Main southern gate, opens to the carnival pavilion.

The Wide Way: Large North-South Avenue intersecting The Golden Way and leading from South Gate to Whisper Hill.

The Golden Way: Large East-West avenue bisecting the Harp Quarter, running through The Downs, and terminating at the docks.

Harp Gate: Main north-eastern gate, opens to the area closest to the Harp River bend.

Notable Guilds Mentioned:

Copper Mongers Guild: Copper is a main export of Almor and the Copper Mongers Guild controls the retrieval, pricing, and sales of copper in Almor.

Furrower's Order: This organization includes farmers and growers who supply and export food throughout Almor.

Woodmaker's Guild: This guild is responsible for the production, purchase, and milling of lumber and other building resources, as well as artisan use and taxation of wood products.

Lord's Alchemical Society: This guild is responsible for overseeing the safety and efficacy of all alchemical recipes and use thereof in Almor.

XAVENER'S PERFORMANCE

A royal command performance before the king's crown came!

By Jared Milne

Not all royal command performances are played by actors strutting and fretting their hour upon a stage. Occasionally, they come in the form of a royal performer!

In most parts of the Flanaess, actors were often part of society's lower classes, making a living off their performances. In the Great Kingdom of Aerdy, the theater was widely admired. Highborn nobles acted as often as did common folk, and a noble's performances could impact their social standing. Brewfest was the height of the theater season, at which the most prestigious plays were staged.

Xavener Norreck Del Darman smiled to himself as he took a graceful bow, reveling in the crowd's applause. He'd just finished starring as Overking Valmon in *The Liar's Court*, a play that described the former Overking's role in Aerdy's decline before the Turmoil Between Crowns. Valmon was infamous for chronically making and

then breaking oaths to anyone and everyone he dealt with if he thought it could benefit him. His lies spread chaos and discord throughout the kingdom, further damaging the Malachite Throne's prestige.

"Valmon never appreciated the value of the truth," he said later to Fleurine, the lovely debutante of House Cranden he'd escorted to the theater, over dinner later that night.

"What do you mean?" Fleurine asked, blinking in surprise.

"I mean that the truth can be just as valuable for a would-be overking as any lie," Xavener said with a smile. "If you're a chronic oathbreaker like Valmon was, people will never trust you. Wise use of the truth can inspire confidence in those you deal with. Lies and truth combined can provide uncertainty...uncertainty that overkings and playwrights alike can use."

"How can they use it?" Fleurine asked, her skepticism clear. "To keep courtiers and audiences from knowing what to expect? To be forced to trust them? To leave them uncertain as to who to believe?"

"Yes, my dear," Xavener said, his smile widening. "That's the secret for overkings and actors alike. They need to not only know their own lines, but those of their fellow performers. They need to know what the script calls for, and how to change it if needed."

Fleurine didn't know what to make of Xavener's smile.

She felt a thrill run down her spine, but whether it was from excitement or fear, she did not know.



CULTISTS OF THARIZDUN #5

MIKE BRIDGES (MAY 2020)

THE SPIRIT FESTIVAL: BREWFEET IN SALTMARSH

A brewing competition for vinters and brewers!

By Nathan Doyle

BREWFEET

While most events of prominence in the Salinmoor take place in Seaton, the capital city of the viscounty, the Saltmarsh Festival of Spirits brings people to the small, yet burgeoning, township. The inns are typically full up during Brewfest, and homesteaders close to Saltmarsh can earn some extra coin if they have room to hostel travelers. Seaton gets the majority of the travelers, especially from Keoland proper. While Saltmarsh has to make due with homesteaders from all over the area, however, they do get a good deal of soldiers from Burle on leave.

One day during the festival is the exception to this; every year since the dwarves started their mining operation, they have hosted a large competition. Participants can enter any kind of alcoholic beverage, be it beers, ales, or harder liquors. Originally, the dwarves were the sole judges, but in more recent years, the town council are the judges, and occasionally prominent persons who have performed a service for Saltmarsh will be invited to be a guest judge. Each judge anonymously rates the drink and then the scores are tallied up by an impartial accountant after the judges have all cast their votes. Voting is done by assigning a number between 1 through 10 to the beverage. So as to pace themselves, the judges are encouraged to take all day to try the various beverages available and to not drink too much of each one. The day of the competition is the one day of brewfest where Saltmarsh pulls people away from Seaton in

decent numbers. Ships arrive early in the morning with people hoping to enter the competition and participate in the event. Additionally, carts and wagons arrive the night before with people camping on the sides of the road as close as they can get to Saltmarsh, eager to peddle wares and join the festivities.

Soldiers and citizens from Burle, traders and merchants from Seaton; these aren't the only ones who occasionally arrive. As there is a tentative peace going on, merchants and smugglers from the domain of the Sea Princes have been known to show up as well. They often bring far off and exotic goods and wares, and have even been known to enter various rums infused with fruits unknown in Keoland.

RUNNING BREWFEET IN YOUR GAME

Brewfest could be an ideal way to run a cold open for your game; if you have yet to begin with *The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh*, each player not from Saltmarsh could be coming to the city for the festival in some capacity or another. And then they can meet each other during the festivities. Personally, I abhor cold opens, and I decided to have brewfest take place after the sahuagin menace had been dealt with. This allowed for the lizardfolk, as my players had taken the diplomatic route, to participate and even had their own brew to enter in the competition.

Depending on at what point you use brewfest in your game, it is an ideal way to exposit upcoming quests from the book. People from Uskarn might arrive and mention the hermitage on Firewatch Island, or possibly, hermits could have come to the festival before the troubles begin on the island. Rumors of the Styes sinking back into the sea, as well as tales of grisly murders could entice the characters to travel there. After the festival of course.

With the exception of alcohol, as there is an abundance during the festival, prices are higher than normal during brewfest. Increased demand for everything, from food to lodgings leads to items being between 10%-25% higher than normal. Characters can haggle the prices back down to normal if they succeed at a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, however if they fail the check by 5 or more, whomever they are haggling with gets annoyed and raises the price to 50% higher than normal. This mostly affects the weekly market as well as the taverns, during this time, the weekly market will have more ready made street food than normal, with a few more communal tables for people to sit and eat if they wish. While there are exceptions, most street food at the weekly market will be served either on a stick or in some flatbread. Fare at the three taverns is more suited for sitting while dining. Prices listed are for the week of Brewfest, they will revert to normal after the festival.

Weekly Market Fare

Mug of Ale or Beer	You provide your own vessel.	3 cp
Bread	One round of cornbread from an 8-inch skillet.	3 cp
Bread	Three rounds of flatbread.	2 cp
Cheese	Pressed cottage cheese rolled with flour and deep fried into three balls served on a skewer.	1 sp, 2 cp
Squalid meal	Raw oysters, cockles, or mussels. Served on flatbread and garnished with vinegar if you wish.	4 cp
Squalid meal	Three deep-fried catfish nuggets.	4 cp
Poor meal	Grilled quipper on a stick, gutted and stuffed with potatoes, corn, and peppers.	7 cp
Poor meal	Pulled pork, served with a sweet sauce and fresh greens, served in flatbread.	7 cp
Meat	Whole barracuda, grilled on a skewer.	3 sp

All three taverns' mainstays are fish, obviously, but also, they all make gumbo and jambalaya. But each of them makes it a different way primarily based on their clientele and their outlook on the rules of cooking. Hanna Rist and Lankus Kurrid both thicken their gumbo with dried and ground sassafras while

Kreb Shenker uses okra grown locally and imported from the Domain of the Sea Princes where it is believed to have originated. And when making Jambalaya, Lankus doesn't use tomatoes because he personally doesn't care for them. All meals except squalid and poor are served with a mug of ale or

beer and banquets will need several hours minimum to prepare. Ideally, persons wanting a banquet will give a full day's notice beforehand.

The Competition

There are many ways to involve the players in the competition. Perhaps one of the entrants wants the player characters to sabotage the other entrants on their behalf. Or perhaps they know about it in time to make their own drink to enter. Or perhaps they've just performed a great deed for Saltmarsh and are invited to be the judges in place of the town council. Whatever the reason you choose, every competition needs competitors. These are a few ideas that you can use in addition to any you wish to add on your own. Some of the entrants are members of Saltmarsh's allies against the Sahuagin, and as such, they might not be present if you have not progressed enough forward through the adventures in *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*. It should be insinuated that there are more entries than just these, but they are lackluster in comparison.

On the day of the competition, all adults are given ten tokens made of wood and then have their hand stamped and they sign the guestbook. This special currency, called a "wooden nickel", is used to obtain a drink from any of the competition entrants, additional wooden nickels can be purchased for 5 cp. This is the primary source of alcohol on the day of the competition as the three taverns are closed due to the proprietors all entering the competition. It is not uncommon though, for people not wanting to drink ten drinks to sell their excess wooden nickels for fewer than 5 cp. The nickels cannot be used to purchase drinks that aren't a part of the competition and cannot be used on other days of the year. However, they are recycled year to year so they could be used the next year.

HANNA RIST

Hanna's entry this year is a bittersweet pale ale that she calls "Pale Redhead". Like most pale ales, Pale Redhead has a very bitter alpha followed by some citrus notes. The difference between Pale Redhead and any old pale ale is that, in addition to the citrus notes, mostly grapefruit, it also has cranberry and hool berry notes. Hool berries are a sweet berry that grows in the nearby Hool marshes, they are very sweet but all attempts thusfar to cultivate them have failed, so they require dangerous forays into the marshes. Most notably about the ale

however, is that when poured into a vessel, the frothy head is red bubbles.

The first year of the competition, Hanna entered her family's signature claw wine to the competition, certain that the dwarven newcomers would appreciate it. For the most part, they did not. Never one to be dissuaded and being a competent brewer, Hanna meticulously works hard each year to win.

KREB SHENKER

Kreb's entry this year is a rum that he calls "Smoked Blackstrap". He has kept his particular methods of making it a secret in case it turns out to be popular. Instead of only charring the inside of the barrel, using Hool marsh peat, he also aged the barrels in a smokehouse. Made predominantly from blackstrap molasses from the domain of the Sea Princes; this rum is sweet, smokey, and spicy.

Kreb has honed his own distilling skills over the years, and has departed from traditional methods and is trying new things. This rum is a huge step up from the first time he entered, when his entry was a pretty run-of-the-mill rum that failed to impress any of the dwarven judges.

LANKUS KURRID

This year, Lankus is trying something new. Instead of brewing his own beer or wine outright, he has made a blended wine with some of his favorites he has collected over the years. His "Blood Red Blend" is something he hopes to impress with. It is a sweet red blend made from some of the finest vintages that he had several barrels of, enough to make plenty for the festival. Lankus has enough of the wines used in the blend stocked up to be able to sell it for months after the competition, win or lose.

Initially, Lankus wasn't certain if the town council would allow him to enter a blended wine that he didn't make the original wines of the blend, but they gave it their blessing. Although, Manistrad didn't seem too convinced that a blended wine could compete with something, as she put it, "truly original".

KELEDEK THE UNSPOKEN

Keledek will be entering a beer that is as much potion as it is alcohol. "Euphoria" is the name of it, and while the beverage itself is a fairly standard wheat beer, the alchemical properties of the secret ingredients makes the person who drinks it feel happy. However, this happiness only lasts for six seconds before whatever they were feeling before comes back even stronger than it was before euphoria touched their lips.

The tall wizard has entered the competition a few times before, but isn't a regular entrant. His drinks always have a magical quirk to them and he has never won. This never seems to bother him though, as he is actually more interested in observing its effects on the festival goers than he is in winning whatever paltry prize is being offered.

CAPTAIN XENDROSS

Claiming that her family has made the beverage for years, Captain Xendross of the Faithful Quartermasters of luz has entered a spicy cinnamon whiskey into the competition. Calling it "86", the beverage burns far more than a mere alcoholic beverage normally would as the cinnamon notes in it linger on your tongue and cheek with a sweet and spicy burning that can only be described as quite the hellish rebuke.

Xendross has never entered the competition before, but has been an avid participant of carousing since coming to Saltmarsh. The festival allows her to act out violently and blame it on the alcohol and avoid any serious repercussions as long as she doesn't kill anyone personally.

GARURT THE LIZARDFOLK

The lizardfolk have brought a concoction popular with their kind to the festival. Calling it "Bog Water Brew" in the common tongue. The drink is a brackish colored semi-clear liquor. It is made predominantly from anise, with sassafras, juniper berries, myrtle berries, wormwood, and grapefruit rinds as well. The result is a very strong drink with a definite licorice flavor plus the essence of the other botanicals added to it.

Snapping Line Fare

Ale or beer	Local microbrews, often infused with locally sourced herbs.	
Gallon		1 sp, 5 cp
Mug		2 cp
Banquet	Banquets at the Snapping line feature an array of locally caught seafood. And might have a whole marlin or swordfish served, stuffed with herbs and vegetables. Shark fin soup and unlimited bread to start the meal off with. And of course drinks are included.	12 gp (per person)
Bread	One round of cornbread from a 12-inch skillet. Served with butter and honey or jam.	3 cp
Bread	Loaf of sourdough bread. Served with butter and copious amounts of garlic.	4 cp
Cheese	Cottage cheese, either served in whey or pressed into a small wheel.	1 sp, 2 cp
Cheese	Salty extra-hard aged cheese, it is very sharp and very dry.	1 sp, 5 cp
Squalid meal	Lobster broth. Served with either some cornbread or a chunk of sourdough.	3 cp
Poor meal	Vegetable soup made in lobster broth. Served with cornbread or a chunk of sourdough.	7 cp
Modest meal	Gumbo, made with lobster and sausage, heavier on the lobster. Served with either hot sauce or allec and your choice of bread.	3 sp, 4 cp
Comfortable meal	Traditional Salinmoor jambalaya, lobster and sausage cooked with tomatoes, celery, peppers, and onions. Served with broth over a bed of grits with either hot sauce or allec and your choice of bread..	5 sp, 5 cp
Wealthy meal	Same as the comfortable meal, but served with a whole lobster on top. Unlimited bread.	9 sp
Meat	Whole steamed lobster	4 sp
Wine	Local barley and grape wines, as well as the Rist family's claw wine.	
Pitcher	Grape, barely, or claw wine.	1 sp, 8 cp
Bottle	Grape or barleywines only.	8 sp

Garurt was surprised initially to learn that the softskins would consume alcohol, although if pressed about it he doesn't know why he was surprised. The cultural exchange is truly remarkable to Garurt and he is eager to try all the different alcohols available.

ARYN THE MERFOLK

Aryn brought a special treat from home for the event, getting enough "Seafoam" for the event was a bit difficult to say the least. The beverage is a rice wine that is infused with salty seaweed and aged in discarded glass fishing floats. Despite the seaweed, the drink isn't overpoweringly salty, although it can be tasted. It is normally served heated up

instead of served at room temperature.

Due to the practical limitations of consuming liquids while underwater, the merpeople do not drink very often and so they do not make much alcohol. If asked, they only first discovered alcohol when a school of merfolk found some flotsam barrels with booze in it. They found that using glass floats worked better for them as the wood of barrels would eventually get waterlogged.

RUMORS TOLD DURING BREWFEST

The following are rumors furnished by authors of various fifth edition adventures available on the Dungeon Masters Guild. The rumors are all plot hooks that you can

use to form your own adventures, but they each also correlate to an adventure available online on DMsGuild.com if you want to lighten your preparation workload.

"Pirate scum scuttled the Moon years ago, but I hear it went down with its cargo: enough silver ore to buy yer own ship!"

—(level 1-3, Oddities & Odysseys: A Heart of Stone)

"Procan's Promenade is so hectic the Scarlet Brotherhood holds one of their biggest meetings simultaneously since no one will notice."

—(level 3, Procan's Promenade)

"Did you hear? They had a tremendous demon problem over in Copia, but the other day everyone woke up and all the demons were just gone! Strange, that. Also they haven't seen their leader in a bit. Do you reckon something's up? Demons don't just disappear overnight, you know..."

—(level 3-6, Lake of Secrets)

"That fishing village just down the coast has pulled in less and less ever since they took out those pirates. Apparently some youngins found something that they say'll bring back the fish and now the town's all abuzz."

—(level 4-6, Before Our Beach Was Bone)

We're doing a tour of brewfests! Next one on the list has a drinking obstacle course!"

—(level 5, The Brewski Jubilee)

"The Snapping Line certainly has a lot of fun events planned! The big darts competition, a gambling night, a show by 'The Amazing' Xef Shoaver... All bound to draw crowds."

—(levels 5-10, Quite the Pickle - A Saltmarsh Adventure)

"A drunk smuggler bragged their captain conspired with the Brotherhood and now has access to a small fleet. They don't moor here though, they got themselves an island."

—(level 6, Sigurd's Island, Tendrils of Saltmarsh: Part 1)

Empty Net Fare

Wicker Goat Fare

Ale or beer	Dark stouts and very bitter pale ales, often garnished with exotic fruit for a touch of sweetness.	
Gallon		1 sp, 8 cp
Mug		3 cp
Banquet	Banquets at the Empty Net usually consist of wild game hunted in the area. Wild turkey and ducks are stuffed with breads, sausages and even oysters. Kreb has even been known to serve crocodile meat from time to time. The meal opens up with copious amounts of tropical fruit. And of course drinks are included.	15 gp (per person)
Bread	Four rounds of flatbread. Served with either butter and jam or oil and roasted garlic.	2 cp
Bread	Loaf of potato bread. Served with butter and jam.	3 cp
Cheese	A dry blue cheese that crumbles when you handle it. It is very aromatic.	1 sp, 1 cp
Cheese	Cottage cheese, pressed and then sliced into strips, which are then pan fried with oil and spices.	1 sp, 3 cp
Squalid meal	Roasted duck necks and heads. Served with a slice of potato bread or a piece of flatbread.	4 cp
Poor meal	Potato soup made in duck broth with sliced bacon or sausage. Served with a slice of potato bread or a piece of flatbread.	8 cp
Modest meal	Gumbo, made with duck and sausage, heavier on the duck. Served with either hot sauce if you want it and your choice of bread.	3 sp, 6 cp
Comfortable meal	Jambalaya, made with duck and sausage cooked with tomatoes, celery, peppers, and onions. Served with broth over a bed of rice with either hot sauce or allec and your choice of bread.	5 sp, 6 cp
Wealthy meal	Same as the comfortable meal, but the rice is prepared with saffron. Served with a half a duck on top. Unlimited bread.	1 gp
Meat	Half a duck, cut lengthwise.	4 sp 3 cp
Spirits (in place of wine)	Fine rums, with an array of different exotic ingredients and spices.	
Pitcher	Grog, half rum, half water, sweetened with lemon or lime juice. Sometimes with a raw egg added to make it frothy.	2 sp
Bottle	Not watered down.	9 sp

Ale, beer or cider	Imported from the Keoish heartland, most of the drinks are mild and light.	
Gallon		1 sp, 4 cp
Mug		2 cp
Banquet	Banquets at the Wicker Goat, true to the namesake, are often goat meat. From whole roasted legs to stuffed kids, they also typically feature vegetables prepared in the manner customary to the northern parts of Keoland.	13 gp (per person)
Bread	A 12-inch skillet with seven biscuits in it. Served with butter and honey or jam.	3 cp
Bread	Loaf of rye bread. Served with butter and either garlic or jam.	4 cp
Cheese	Classic Keoish cheddar, aged at least two years then, imported from the north.	1 sp, 2 cp
Cheese	Classic Keoish cheddar curds, battered and deep fried.	1 sp, 5 cp
Squalid meal	Bowl of cold potato salad. Served with sauerkraut on the side.	4 cp
Poor meal	Two hard boiled eggs wrapped with sausage and fried. Served with sauerkraut on the side.	8 cp
Modest meal	Gumbo, made with crab, mussels, and sausage or ham, heavier on the pork. Served with potato salad and sauerkraut and your choice of rye bread or a biscuit.	3 sp, 7 cp
Comfortable meal	Jambalaya, lobster and sausage cooked with celery, peppers, and onions. Served with broth over a bed of grits with potato salad and sauerkraut and your choice of rye bread or a biscuit.	5 sp, 8 cp
Wealthy meal	Same as the comfortable meal, but served with a goat shank or a whole trout on top, grilled or fried. Unlimited bread.	9 sp, 2 cp
Meat	Roasted goat shank.	5 sp
Meat	Whole trout, grilled or fried.	4 sp
Wine	Wines made by the loyalist homesteaders, as well as fine Keoish brandy.	
Pitcher	Grape wine, red or white.	1 sp, 5 cp
Bottle	Brandy	9 sp

THE DESPORTIUM OF MAGICK



A Grand Display of Illusion, at the pinnacle of Growfest

By Kristoph Nolen

"We can do this. I know we can. We just have to remember all the color details on the hydra's scales, and make the lighting shine on the scales when the fireball goes flying toward the crowd of people."

Loran sat alone, thinking to herself, and began trying to concentrate on what norkers looked like. She imagined the look of worn leather, and tooth and bone fasteners. A tiny creature hunched on the inn's table before her, only inches tall and moving about in place, scratching itself and making a face and a rude gesture at a fly landing nearby.

As Loran concentrated on the illusion, a youthful serving girl walked up beside her and set down her bowl of ragout—she was thankful that, because of the holiday, they were serving something better than slumgullion. The serving girl watched the tiny norker on the table, and smiled a knowing smirk at Loran and said, "Are you on one of the teams for the Desportium of Magick?"

Loran nodded, smiling at the thought, because it was a rare and notable thing to be given an invitation to compete in the Desportium. Only a few people each year would be afforded the privilege. Only five teams were allowed to compete each year. Loran was convinced this was the year she would earn herself membership in the vaunted Guild of Wizardry.

steaming—a rarity at inns like this. Loran reminded herself of the veritable treasure hoard she'd win. 5,000 silver nobles!!!

The bowl was warm in her hands, and she thanked the serving girl. Loran took her first spoonful, seeing out of the corner of her eye that the serving girl hadn't left. Not looking away from her bowl, she continued eating, and sized up the young girl.

"Have you seen the Desportium before?" she asked. Loran knew she couldn't have been much past her 13th summer.

"I got to go when I was younger, but I don't exactly remember it. These days, I always gotta work, since Papa needs me to get the tables or he won't be able to do it all." The girl shrugged her shoulders and began wiping off the edge of the table. "I'll get to go in a few years after I get married to Thomas—he works in the stable right now, but he'll be a journeyman blacksmith soon."

Deciding that she'd fought norkers often enough times, she could generate 100 of them without dropping any details, she turned toward the lass, smiling. "Then I'll tell you all about it."

Shortly after sunset on the last day of Growfest, crowds gather near the Grand Citadel, in the plaza and all around the hill. The Master of Ceremonies of the Guild of Wizardry introduces the contestants in their teams to much applause and fanfare. The judges are also introduced. These traditionally include the Guildmaster of the Guild of Wizardry, the President of the Society of Magi, and a member of the Circle of Eight.

The contestants are all allotted 40 minutes to perform their show, coordinating with teammates to put on a high-intensity, eye-catching, dramatic reenactment of an centuries-old siege of the Citadel. Only creatures the illusionists have personal knowledge of may be depicted, so mages from far off lands or who have adventuring experience often dazzle the crowds with the strange and marvelous creatures

LORAN

CG Human Illusionist Wiz14

Possessions:

Bracers of defense, cloak of protection, rod of terror, dagger +1, ring of fire resistance, wand of paralyzation, flying carpet

Background:

Loran began life as a warrior but died after exposure to poison gas. She was reincarnated as an illusionist. As a result, her spell choices are often combat-related. On adventures, she tends to "adopt" her party as her family.

—1993 [Trading Cards](#), card #25 of 60

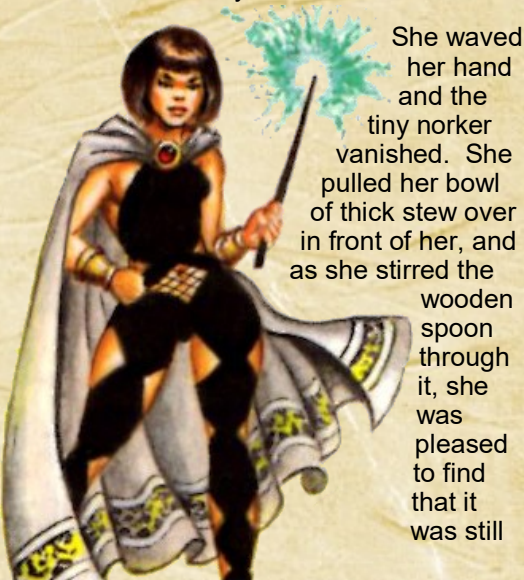
they know.

With the changing of teams, announcements and judges recording their scoring of the contestants in between the performances, the show typically goes on 'til midnight.

The biggest prize for winning, for many illusionists not living in the Free City, is membership in the Guild of Wizardry. Many participants seek this alone, even above the cash prizes. It can bring a spellcaster not only renown and social station, but also gives the opportunity to advance their craft in ways most would never have access to! Access to the library of the Guild of Wizardry alone is worth as much as the silver nobles!

As the night progresses, the crowds cheer and roar as the amazing illusory dragons belch fire upon the Citadel, savage goblins and norkers swarm in numbers unimaginable, and a vast multitude of creatures each stranger than the last charges the front gates and walls.

Only one team wins, and at the end of the night, the announcement of the winners brings the audience to an enormous crescendo. It ends the celebration of the Desportium, and ends Growfest. With the coming of midnight, Low Summer begins. The end of the show is often culminated with a shouting and cheering countdown to the and beginning of the new season.



She waved her hand and the tiny norker vanished. She pulled her bowl of thick stew over in front of her, and as she stirred the wooden spoon through it, she was pleased to find that it was still

NEEDFEST CUSTOMS OF THE RHENNEE



When the winter is past, the riverfolk celebrate Needfest!

By Kristoph Nolen

Oi! Gadjo! Welcome again to the Bardge Inn! No, Vassili, they're with me—leave them be!

So, gadjo, you come once again to your good and faithful friend Merिताelin Windrigale to learn of the People of the Waters, eh? You know, you shouldn't be so brash about coming to me, you must use a little discretion and have pachiv—respect; I ought not to be speaking to you of our customs. We have a taboo against it!

What's this, though? Festivals? Of course the Rhenfolk have customs for festivals and celebrations! Come, let your good friend Maerिताelin tell you!

The Rhennee riverfolk do not celebrate many of the same holidays other folk of the Flanaess do. We do not practice worship of divine beings, at all. We don't deny they exist or anything like that, mind you ... we simply do not worship them—even the divinity of nature. We do, however, find every reason to celebrate life and happiness. Our lives are more secular, to be sure. But, our happiness is not dependent on others outside our close families on our barges. We don't object to participating in come of your customs, though! Any reason to celebrate life and its wonders!

The solstice comes and days begin to grow longer, our barges begin to be able to ply the rivers of the Flanaess more and more. Gone are the days of hardships and icy water. But, those days serve to remind us of the bounty of the coming spring! When the people of the Free City celebrate Breadgiving Day, we are often there, ready to take meals with everyone and receive the bounty of the Oerth to fill our stomachs, just as much as any other person!

We also do, however, have other customs. Not all Rhennee mark their ages in the same way. Some follow the customs popular amongst the *gadjo*; celebrating the specific day of their birth. But, an older custom is to mark one's age by the number of winters they have gone through, or how many Needfests. It is the idea of celebrating life; a summer child has no worries in their early life. Food is plentiful and weather

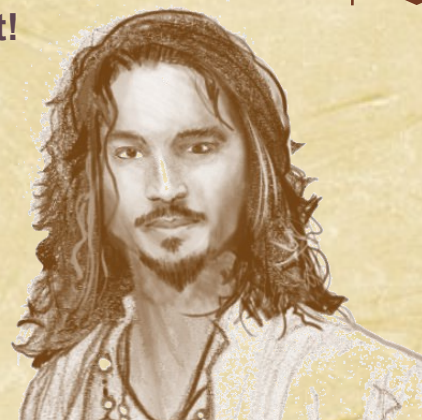
and the Waters are warm. However, making it through a winter when times are hard and food is scarce is a time worthy of celebration! So, you might hear us say, "I have seen 32 winters" or something like "What does he know? He was born in spring!" So, each Midwinter's Eve is a time when we celebrate not only the new year, but also that we've made it through another year and are a year older! A new year and a birthday all in one night! Can you imagine the parties on the barges those nights?!

One of the better things we do in Needfest is to share food with each other, not unlike your Breadgiving Day. When we have made it through the worst of winter and have some surplus of necessities, we take care of our own you might not have been as lucky in the colder months. We have a couple of customary dishes we share with everyone when our *capo* bring our barges together.

We collect meats, grains, and vegetables of most all kinds from various of our kin, and make something of a "potluck" as you might call it.

The first thing we make is, well, it's a kind of stew. Many of our dishes are kind of a stew! Our *gulasz* isn't always the same, and it's often whatever ingredients are at hand go in. We make many mixed-meat dishes, so that as we cook, one batch might taste very different from the next. The stews are usually very thick, and hearty. Some are meat-heavy, and some have something like a fried meatball with them.

Sometimes, these stews are served over a grain like a pilaf or risotto. Grain is easier to find and keep longer than meats, so much like you, *gadjo*, we use it as a staple. We also take maize and make it into a very thick porridge, then simmer it until it's almost a dough and press it into a pan and put it over a fire. This *mămăligă* or *polenta* is not truly a "bread" and doesn't rise, but it is a very filling. It is customary to cut it not with a knife, but rather with a tight thread held between both hands. It is served with a stew over it, or eaten in hand like bread



with butter on it, if it's available. Sometimes it is served fried with a meat sauce over it.

The next of our customary foods is similar to what you'd call a dumpling. We take any meats we have, and grind them together, along with minced celery, onion, and carrot. This is wrapped in a thin dough and fried in a pan with oil until it's crispy. These *lumpia* are almost always different from one panful to the next, and it's common to go back for seconds or thirds of these to have different flavors.

Aside from the common foods we serve each other during Needfest, we have other customs, but likely the one that is most enjoyable is music. Tambours and fiddles play joyously when we are together. Barges are lashed together and we walk amongst them almost like they were a single living floor. Musicians go from barge to barge, spreading the love of life to our *familja* and lighten hearts after the long, cold winter.

Lastly, we have a tradition in spring of hiding tiny pouches of coins to spread the bounty of growth with others. One of these pouches found during Needfest is considered amongst the most fortunate omens one can have.

As always, I am here as your guide, *gadjo*. If you stay close and listen to what I tell you of the Rhennee, you will learn much of our ways. You merely have to experience a culture that is not yours, and learn to see us as the creatures of The Waters that we are. They are our home, and we want nothing more than to live our lives upon them. I bid you *latcho dromardipe* ... a good journey.

Art by Kristoph Nolen

THE THERIMOIRE OF HEWARD



A musical artifact fit for bardic performances at festivals!

By Joe “Greyhawk Groggnard” Bloch—find his [YouTube Channel!](#)

The quasi-deity [Heward](#) is known for his mastery of both music and technology, and is perhaps most famous for his Mystical Organ, which produces a number of different magical effects, and whose whereabouts are lost to history. However, the Organ is not his only work that has survived.

Part song book and part spell book, the Therimoire of Heward is a magical grimoire that is geared towards bards and illusionists of musical bent. First mentioned in an inventory of the [Viceroyalty of Ferrond](#) (modern-day [Furyondy](#)) in 151 CY, reports of the Therimoire have appeared across the Flanaess sporadically since then. Most recently, it is known to have been presented to the high priest of the goddess [Lirr](#) in [Innspsa](#), during the great Growfest festival celebrated by that goddess's Seven Shrines, in 540 CY. It is said to have been stolen several years later by an unknown thief, and it has not turned up since.

The book itself is over-sized, being some 16 inches wide and 20 inches tall. It has a cover of soft and supple leather, but it is of such a nature as to be very resistant to tears and rips. Embossed in the leather is a single letter H, highly stylized and in an antique style.

The first thing that should be noted about the book itself is that it is, in fact, a sentient artifact, in much the same way that a magic sword can be intelligent. It has an INT of 16 and an EGO of 11. The Therimiore has a neutral (good) alignment, and can speak Common, Ferrel, Velondi, Flan, Old Oeridian, and the alignment tongue of Balance. Indeed, the book has an excellent singing voice, and will often burst into song, sometimes in inopportune moments. It has the ability to charm person with a 3" range three times per day, and can create an illusion (as the wand) twice per day, with a range of 12".

The Therimoire is broken up into three distinct sections. The first is a treatise on the nature of technology and things

technological. Anyone with an INT of less than 15 attempting to read even a portion of this section will be struck as if by a *confusion* spell for 1-10 days. Those with an INT of 15 or higher (not coincidentally the minimum intelligence for bard characters) who read the section will take 2-7 days of uninterrupted study, at the end of which time they will be able to fashion items such as clockwork mechanisms, complex devices working on mechanical principles, etc. Although the initial proficiency with these skills will be someone rudimentary, with practice and diligence using these skills, they can be improved to the point where quite wondrous items can be created. It is said that copies of this section have been made and can be found nearly as frequently as other magical books such as the manual of gainful exercise or book of exalted deeds.

The second portion of the Therimoire is a song book and sheet music for organ, seemingly unremarkable on its surface. However, the songs listed within can be played by the Mystical Organ to produce many of its wondrous magical effects. The DM is encouraged to come up with the nature of the songs and the effects they produce, as per the guidelines in the AD&D DUNGEON MASTERS GUIDE, but possession and study of this book will make much of the trial-and-error normally required redundant, as anyone with the skill to play the Organ can simply work from this book. Of the 34 magical effects possible by playing the Organ, fully 21 are listed herein (those which are benign, as well as the Organ's prime powers; malevolent powers, as well as side effects, will come to be learned by trial and error). It is thought that, owing to the specialized nature of this section of the book, it has not been copied and distributed as an independent work.

The third portion of the Therimoire is a section of special prayers to receive druidical spells which are uniquely available to bards. The following are added to the spell list for bards only, but only if they have access to these

special prayers.

FIRST LEVEL

- Audible Glamer
- Charm Person
- Comprehend Languages
- Message
- Taunt
- Ventriloquism

SECOND LEVEL

- Deafness
- Locate Object
- Magic Mouth
- Vocalize
- Whispering Wind

THIRD LEVEL

- Illusionary Script
- Suggestion
- Fourth Level
- Charm Monster
- Shout

As with the first section, there are reports that the third section of the Therimoire have been copied and distributed separately.



Art by Harry Quinn

ERKIL'S SKULLSPLITTER

A brewer's artifact for Brewfest!

By Mark "Sollace" Allen

For many years the Mountain Dwarf Erkil Stoneguard plied his trade as an adventurer throughout the many and varied lands of the Flanaess. He journeyed with the much-storied Delabnia the elven cavalier, and Fostalite Wand-wielder, the famous St. Cuthbert worshipping Illusionist. Their adventures are still sung of in many taverns across the Wild Coast where they chose to make their home upon retirement. Scholarly pursuits may have been what Fostalite had in mind but for Erkil there was only one thing that retirement had in store for him – ALE!

Having had a unique magical item manufactured for them in the Free City of Greyhawk, A variation on Daern's Instant Fortress that creates from a roughly carved wooden box a small inn and brewery, Erkil and his companions started to brew dwarvish ale, offer training in skill at arms, and all manner of magical activities from minor enchantments, scrolls, and potions and such.

Though Erkil was a renowned warrior he had put away his axe 'Skullsplitter' and instead focused on creating ales that would rival the best in cities and towns across the Flanaess.

His real breakthrough came with a jolt when Fostalite accidentally dropped a potion of heroism into the brewing vat. Thus was Erkil's Skullsplitter created and named after his famous magical axe.

The ale is ruby red in colour, slightly sweet with a peppery finish and just a hint of vine fruits. The subtle malty undertones and pleasant, woody flavours have been known to lull the unwary into a false sense of security as it seems to be an easy ale to quaff while sitting beside the fire or devouring a fine bowl of beef and mushroom stew.

This pleasant, easy to drink but very strong ale has the added bonus of lifting the spirits of those that drink it (gain the effects of a bless spell for 10 minutes). However, much like its namesake, the

weighty blade of Skullsplitter must always fall.

Within a few hours of imbibing the last draught of Skullsplitter the drinker starts to develop an incredible hangover and a headache that just won't quit (gain the effects of a bane spell for 1 hour), but that does not seem to stop the patrons of The Wanderer's Arms (a play on Fostalite's nickname) from coming back and drinking more of this flavoursome ale.

Tales of this ale began to spread and demand for the Wanderer's Arms and in particular Erkil's Skullsplitter have, over the last few years, begun to come in from Safeton and Narwell and Dyvers. Perhaps the most prestigious request has come from Ilena Norbelos, Despotrix of Hardby, who has provided a retainer to Erkil to bring the Wanderer's Arms to the city each year for the Brewfest celebrations. The inn is set up on a large floating pontoon purely for the use of the Hardby Marines.

For Brewfest, Skullsplitter is kept in a ready supply along with other, less drastic ales. Erkil, Fostalite and Delabnia spend the best part of two weeks in the city providing a place of bonhomie and fraternity for the Marines away from the general public.

Ilena Norbelos has grown weary of the Marines and the townsfolk getting into all sorts of altercations during Brewfest and has asked the proprietors of the Wanderer's Arms to come to the city for the next 5 years.

Erkil has brewed a special batch of Skullsplitter in honour of the patronage shown by the Despotrix of Hardby which he calls Skullsplitter Heavy. This deep, mahogany red ale is stronger than the regular Skullsplitter, while still having tones of malty sweetness and hoppy bitterness it gives off aromas of spiced dwarven Bannock cakes, hints of black treacle and dark vine fruits. The effects of this ale are also stronger than those of the regular Skullsplitter (the bless and



Art by Catbat Art

bane effects lasting for double the duration).

Erkil keeps the recipe for these ales a closely guarded secret, it is not written down. Some have tried earnestly to steal the ale at the end of the night, but the Inn returns to its small box size, and Erkil and his companions are seldom tracked down and none have thus far managed to gain access to it.

There we have it, two star brews to grace any slightly sticky, tavern table during Brewfest, provided you can outbid the Despotrix you too can enjoy a pint or two of Erkil's Skullsplitter.



BEEKEEPERS OF BADWALL



A local organization and a Midsummer ritual

By Les Reno

Prior to its sacking by Turrosh Mak's forces in 584 CY, the town of Badwall was famous for its bees and their products, even though the days of true prosperity were long since finished. The region's rangers, scouts, and hunters all testified to the quality of Badwall beeswax, claiming few Oerthly materials could improve on the substance when waxing bowstrings to keep them dry, supple, and reducing friction. Candles made from the wax were said to be especially efficacious at keeping wandering spirits at a distance during long winter nights, and many a connoisseur praised the local honey mead for its flavor and smoothness. Chirurgeons and other healers celebrated the honey's qualities as a potent medicine for treating severe cuts and skin infections. Some accounts even claim Grand Druids of the Old Faith who elected to become Hierophants never failed to request a meal of their birthplace's bread and Badwall honey before departing to pursue the Final Mysteries. Even the elves of Celene are said to have marveled at the competition posed by humans they had instructed in the art and science of beekeeping. Following the Hateful Wars, orcs, ogres, hobgoblins, and related creatures migrating into the Pomarj devastated the town's economy. Attacks against Badwall became almost seasonal events, and even though the community's defenses held, inadequacies in the face of potential full-scale assault became apparent to all. The majority of beekeeping families took their wealth and their hives and headed north, away from the possibility of raids and razing. "Badwall Honey" was no longer exclusive to the town. The remaining laborers turned to banditry or mercenary activity, with only a handful of workers maintaining the old way of life. Meanwhile, exhausted and impoverished refugees from the Pomarj moved into Badwall. These newcomers quickly discovered their options consisted of crime, taking the path of the sell-sword, working the mud and wooden apiaries, performing

whatever other local labor they could find—or relying on the impoverished town's charity. A brief renaissance of the honey and wax trades followed this population influx, but Badwall could no longer compete with its beekeepers-turned-rivals now residing elsewhere along the Wild Coast.

Until the Orcish Empire's fatal push north, a curious tradition persisted as a reminder of Badwall's better days. Each year, while some communities celebrated the Feast of St. Cuthbert (Growfest 4th), Badwall locals prepared a special wooden apiary in the shape of a human head. A priest or priestess of Berei, goddess of agriculture, community, and family, blessed this peculiar buzzing sculpture. The cleric then instructed the matriarchs of the beekeeping families to convey the thing to a hidden spot. On Midsummer Day later that year, the matriarchs brought the wooden head to the center of town. Other women, all connected in some way with the matriarchs and their business and all wearing yellow dresses, followed the apiary and its escorts in twin lines. Blindfolded boys, scions of the beekeeping families and associated trades, stepped forward when called by the priest. Each was crowned with a cornflower garland, turned round and round and round again by the laughing girls, and swung at the head with club or broadsword until one succeeded in splitting it open. The triumphant male, now called the Honeycomb Servant, fled the provoked bees, leading the angry swarm through the scattering, cheering crowd. The cleric of Berei expected the boy to suffer as many stings as possible; thus proving him worthy of his human Queen. Divine magic preserved the fellow's health, but the pain and inflammation were necessary and instructive. Once the insects tired of the chase, the youth returned to the town center. The matriarchs removed his clothes, and his chosen one, the town's eldest unwed girl, approached him. In agony and still blindfolded, he stood naked before the community, his skin red,

spotted, and swelling. His Queen rubbed honey on her lips and gums, then embraced and kissed him. The couple's families would share in labor and comfort through the harvest and the long nights; they would be the first couple married at winter's end.

According to legend, this ritual honored the coming of the first bees to the future town of Badwall. For reasons known only to themselves, the elves had offered instruction, but they had denied the town's settlers the gift of a hive. The Flan wanted to practice what the elves had taught; they would have their own bees, their own hives. The advice of an Old Faith druid settled matters. The settlement's founders had recently apprehended a criminal, a deranged man who claimed a constant buzzing of voices had driven him to violation and murder. In accordance with custom, they buried him to the neck in hard ground. But this time, per the druid's instructions, they did not leave the wrongdoer to starve. Instead, Old Kalvadorn, the group's strongest warrior, raised an oaken club and bashed the madman's skull open. Legend claims sunlight purified the bad thoughts escaping from the criminal's head and transformed them into a swarm of bees. The insects circled three times around Kalvadorn, then converged upon an earthen apiary crafted by the warrior's eldest wife. Old Kalvadorn received the druid's blessing and was told he had done a sacred deed. The settlers should be patient with the hive; dark thoughts take time to adjust to daylight. With no killer to cut short the nights of lovemaking, the following year, three women had seven sons by Kalvadorn, and the majority of the community's women also birthed fine sons and daughters. That same summer, the bees produced their first full bounty of wax and honey. Thus, to the local way of thinking, a single act had bound together the fortunes of the community and its insects.

With the passing of time and the proliferation of the bees, the Flan

whose community would come to be called Badwall sublimated the hero-figure's ritualistic execution of a transgressor into the Midsummer tradition of the head-shaped apiary, its destruction by a candidate representing the next generation of leadership, and the blessings of the Summer Queen. The settlement grew as other Flan tribes, seeking to maintain something of their old ways in the face of intertribal conflicts and looming migrations, married into its prosperous bloodlines. As local culture changed, dangerous criminals became subject to decapitation or hanging, depending upon the offense. Finally, with the integration of Suel refugees who had fled the destruction of their Imperium into the Wild Coast's cultural life, priests of Bralm, the Suel goddess of industriousness, community, and insects, influenced local worship of Berei, and annual observance of the bees' arrival obtained its final symbolic form. Oversight of the summer ritual alternated between the faiths and was sometimes performed by devotees of both. Even as the two goddesses became conflated at the level of practice, people paid tribute to each deity separately, although outsiders found it difficult to determine which goddess was being honored at a given time. For their part, both divine beings seem satisfied with their followers' arrangements.

Some of the beekeeping families who relocated from Badwall after the spread of orcs and other hostile creatures into the Pomarj still observe variations of the ancient custom, but these survivals are severely altered from the original and tend to be private or family affairs, no longer tied to the social life of whichever communities they are part.

NOTES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

In **Artifact of Evil**, Gary Gygax describes Badwall as a "poor place, relying on local crafts, some mercantile exchange, exports of honey and wax, and the employment and return of its mercenary company to bolster its economy periodically" (p.57). Given the usefulness of honey and wax to ancient and medieval communities, I started to think about Badwall's past. According to the novel, the town officially holds five thousand people, but observation suggests eight to ten

thousand within the walls and "perhaps another quarter of that number dwelling in its outskirts." At some point, I reasoned, Badwall must have been prosperous enough to appeal to the Wild Coast's growing human population. I can easily imagine the place as having started as an old Flan settlement; beehives and perhaps lumber would have contributed to its later expansion.

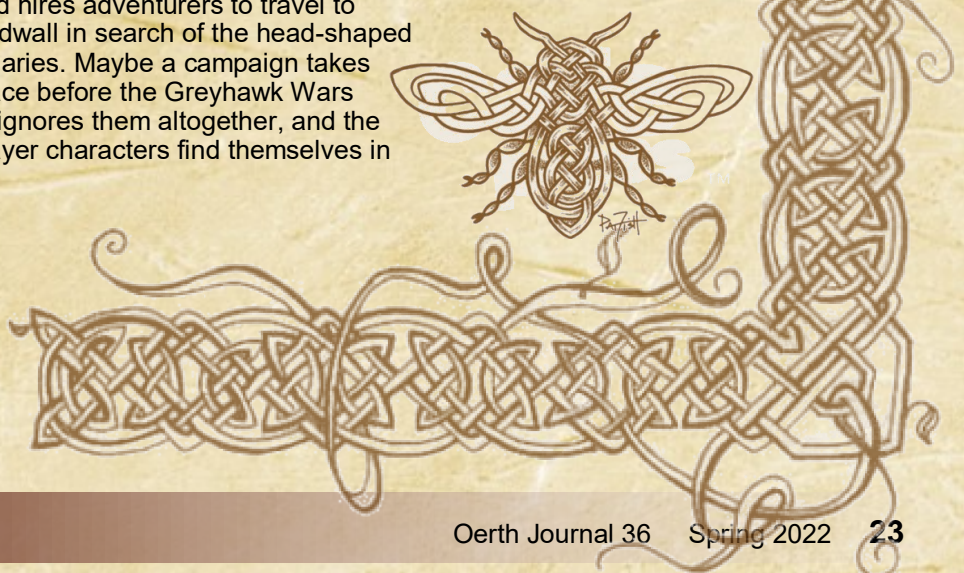
While inventing the origins of the Badwall ritual, I thought of the ancient belief in *begonia*, the spontaneous emergence of bees or wasps from equine or bovine corpses, and of recurring methods of execution in which prisoners are buried to their necks and exposed to the elements or otherwise terminated. I also considered the alleged use of trepanation to release "bad thoughts" from the human head. The association of all these things with a community's well-being, including marriage and fertility, seemed natural, if readers will forgive the pun.

The yellow dresses of the town's women deliberately recall the yellow and gold robes worn by priests of Pelor on Midsummer Day (*The Adventure Begins*, pg. 44), although Badwall's citizens associated the color with honey and the bees' yellow fur as well as sunlight. The Suel who brought Bralm to Badwall traveled with the founders of Narwell and Safeton, further up the Coast.

This fictional history offers local flavor, but it also provides DMs and their players with opportunities for social interaction and adventure. Perhaps one of the former beekeeping families seeks to acquire tokens of its heritage and hires adventurers to travel to Badwall in search of the head-shaped apiaries. Maybe a campaign takes place before the Greyhawk Wars or ignores them altogether, and the player characters find themselves in

town during preparations for the ritual. Perhaps they're recruited to recover stolen bees or their products from bandits or especially cunning (but also clueless) orcs or goblins while the bulk of the town's mercenaries are earning coin elsewhere. Other adventurers might respond to rumors of strange insect life in the area following the town's devastation by Turrosh Mak's forces. They might discover orcs, goblins, and bandits spotted with stings, and investigate signs of a vengeful power growing among the ruins. Clerics of Berei or Bralm might wish to travel to Badwell to honor the place's past, and druids of the Old Faith might feel a peculiar attraction to the site. One could even construct an adventure around the antics of an itinerant drunk who happens to be a werebear and wants the honey!

Another possibility is for some beekeepers to have made it out of Badwall during the attack from the Pomarj and took their customs with them. There may be a small farm somewhere in the Domain where they have a tiny festival but still practice the yearly ritual with the head-shaped apiary.



SEATON



Keoland's harbor in the south

By Casey Brown

The below stat block incorporates elements from both the 3.x/Pathfinder and 5th editions of the game. NPCs' non-standard class names are from 5th edition and may include 3rd-party-published material.

SEATON

LN large town

Proper Name: Borough of Seaton, Capital of the Viscounty of Salinmoor in the Kingdom of Keoland

Founded: -155 CY

Ruler: The Right Honorable Marik Feldren (N male human knight), Lord Mayor Baron Seaton

Government: Feudal Autocracy (the Lord Mayor serves at the Viscount of Salinmoor's pleasure but traditionally the position is hereditary and held by the current Baron Seaton)

Alignments: LN*, LG, N, NG

Population: 5,000—Human 75% (Sof), Elf 10% (sylvan 80%, high 20%), Gnome 6%, Halfling 5% (lightfoot), Half-elf 2%, Dwarf 1%, Other 1%

Notable NPCs:

Lord Aiken Secunforth, The Right Honorable Viscount of Salinmoor (LG male human paragon knight)

Lady Lizbeth Secunforth, The Most Honorable Viscountess of Salinmoor (NG female human noble)

Lady Aida Secunforth, The Most Honorable Dowager Viscountess of Salinmoor (LG female human noble)

Cronin Secunforth, The Honorable Master of Salinmoor (LG teen-aged male human fighter 1)

Sir Roger Dobbs, 8th Baronet of Conwy on the Salin (**NE male human noble**)

Constable Adelard Randalson (LG male human veteran)

Sergeant Talia Crowley (NG female human myrmidon), investigator in the city watch

Highest Level Spellcasters by Class

Bard 7th (Oriel, N female sylvan elf)

Cleric 9th (Reynard, CG male human [Kord])

Druid 9th (Gerland, N sylvan elf)
Paladin 12th (Lord Aiken Secunforth)

Ranger 8th (Ralf, NG male human)

Sorcerer 6th (Kaitlin the Wave Crusher, LN female human [usually out to sea with Keoish navy])

Warlock 4th (Lilliana Silverstring, NE female grey elf [secretly a darkling elder, servant of Granny Nightshade and the Archfey])

Wizard 6th (Sniv, LN male gold kobold)

Languages: Common, Keolandish, Elven

Religions: Osprem, Procan, Xerbo, Heironeous, St. Cuthbert, Phaulkon, Zilchus, Fharlanghn, Kord, Lydia, Norebo, Ehlonna

Allies: Wood elves, treants, and seelie fey of the Dreadwood (all members of the Wild Flame Pact)

Enemies: Sea Princes (all factions), Scarlet Brotherhood, unseelie fey of the Dreadwood, various monstrous humanoids native to the Azure Sea

Resources: Farming (grains, peppers, tomatoes), Fish (crab, fish, lobster), Silver

Corruption -1; Crime -2; Economy

+1; **Law** +10; **Lore** +1; **Society** -7

Qualities Deep Traditions, Militarized, Strategic Location

Danger +5% (+1 on d20 or +5 on d100 random urban encounter charts)

Coinage: [Keoland standard] griffon (pp), lion (gp), eagle (ep), hawk (sp), sparrow (cp)

Marketplace Base Value 2,200 gp (25% chance of finding item under this price in the town's markets or shops)

Purchase Limit 10,000 gp (this is the cap on the value of any single item sold in the town, magical or otherwise)

Common Magic Items 10% (chance of being available for sale in the town or see the Downtime rules in *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*)

Uncommon Magic Items 5%

Rare Magic Items 1%

Very Rare Magic Items 0%

Legendary Magic Items 0%

Overview: Founded in -155 CY, Seaton was Keoland's southernmost sizable settlement until 301 CY when Monmurg was established. It is a relatively recent development, dating back to the 290s CY, that Seaton was named the capital of the Viscounty of Salinmoor, Keoland's southern-most province on the Azure Sea. Before that, the viscounty did not exist and Seaton was part of the demesne of the Duchy of Gradsul.

Seaton was originally founded as a small fishing town, similar to nearby Saltmarsh. While it has seen periods of military activity in the past, most

notably during the Toli Wars when wooden palisades surrounded the town, Seaton is now a heavily fortified port due to conflicts with the Sea Princes in the not-so-distant past. Located on the northern shore of the Bay of Javan, Seaton is home to Keoland's southernmost naval fleet, infantry regiments, and cavalry squadrons. As a result, what was once a sleepy maritime viscounty of small import to the kingdom has been transformed into a military bulwark against raiders, slavers, and pirates. Together with the small garrison at Splitrock, the forces here protect the residents of the Redshore Peninsula and patrols extend all the way to Saltmarsh, up the Salin River, and occasionally to Burle.

Administered by The Right Honorable Marik Feldren, Lord Mayor Baron Seaton, Seaton is generally an orderly town with low crime rates, high levels of Keoish patriotism, and large numbers of Keoish military sailors, soldiers, and veterans residing within its walls (all of whom take a dim view on piracy and smuggling). Located on the eastern shore of the mouth of the shallow and slow-flowing Salin River, most of the town is safely contained within sturdy town walls which extend out from Seaton Castle, itself located on a rocky outcropping at the very tip of the river's mouth. Port Seaton, located outside the town's walls on the Azure Sea's coast, features moderately deep waters and is home to Seaton's docks, piers, and wharfs. The piers closest to Seaton Castle are generally reserved for Keoish naval vessels while the rest are often home to large fishing trawlers. Smaller family fishing boats generally are berthed in small slips located at the far end of the harbor district. In short, Seaton is normally a perfectly boring military port town that is growing to be a small city.

The castle itself is home to the viscount and his family as well as attending functionaries and important staff members. The Lord Mayor Baron Seaton and his family reside in a house located close to the castle. All viscounty and town business is conducted in the castle; each morning, the viscount's court is called to session in the Great Hall. Upon being dismissed by the viscount, the Lord Mayor Baron Seaton holds court in the nearby Lesser Hall before retiring to his administrative offices in the castle's inner ward. The viscount's administrative offices are also located in the inner ward, closest to the viscount's apartments. The constable, who reports to the Lord Mayor Baron Seaton and attends his court every morning (although he is not required to attend the Viscount's court as that is when he conducts the constabulary's roll call), operates out of the town's constabulary headquarters located near the city's central market.

LORD OBMI, BONESHADOW OF IUZ

Medium humanoid (dwarf), chaotic evil

Armor Class 22 (+2 shield, mithral plate)

Hit Points 105 (5d10 plus 7d8)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +8, Dex +2, Con +7, Int +8, Wis +8, Cha +2

Skills Athletics +12, Deception +10, Intimidation +10,

Perception +8, Stealth +10

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 12 (8400 XP)

Duergar Resilience.

ACTIONS

Action Surge. Lord Obmi can take one additional action on his turn. This can be used 1 time per short rest.

Assassinate. Lord Obmi has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn in the combat yet, and any hit you score against a creature that is surprised is a critical hit.

Cunning Action. Lord Obmi can take a bonus action on each of his turns in combat. This action can be used only to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Dwarven Thrower. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (1d8+9) bludgeoning damage. When you hit with a ranged attack using this weapon, it deals an extra 1d8 damage or, if the target is a giant, 2d8 damage. Immediately after the attack, the weapon flies back to your hand.

Evasion. When Lord Obmi is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a DEX saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Fighting Style-Dueling. When Lord Obmi is wielding a melee weapon in one hand and no other weapons, he gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls with that weapon.

Improved Critical. Your weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Multiattack. The Lord Obmi, Boneshadow of Iuz makes 2 attacks.

Second Wind. Once per short rest, Lord Obmi can use a bonus action to regain 1d10+5 HP.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Lord Obmi deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Lord Obmi that isn't incapacitated and Lord Obmi doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

REACTIONS

Uncanny Dodge. When an attacker that Lord Obmi can see hits him with an attack, he can use his reaction to halve the attack's damage against him.

House Secunforth

Ennobled during the reign of Tavish IV as Viscount of Salinmoor and tasked with overseeing the construction of Bale Keep, to keep an eye out for trouble out of Port Torvin and the Hool Marshes, House Secunforth quickly retreated to the viscounty's sleepy fishing capital of Seaton once Bale Keep's construction was completed and its barracks filled. For the most part, administering the remote viscounty consists of monitoring the southeastern Dreadwood Forest, ensuring the protection of the fishing fleet from pirates out of Port Torvin or Monmurg, and discouraging various denizens of the Hool Marshes from leaving the Javan river delta area for dryer lands to the east—all tasks that the distant cousins of the Neheli found to be extremely tedious.

The current viscount, Lord Aiken Secunforth, is a more militant noble than many of his ancestors; as a second son, he had served in the Keoish cavalry. When his older brother was lost at sea in 556 CY during a sudden storm, during what should have been a routine sail to Redshore, Aiken was summoned home by his parents. Never having expected to live a nobleman's life, Aiken chafed at the administrative tediousness of his new role until his parents, sensing his frustrations, named him commander of the viscounty's military forces and sent him west to assess the condition of the woefully maintained Bale Keep. While gone, his father developed a lingering chest cold which would torment him for years.

While out west, Aiken and his small engineering company spent a year renovating the keep while exploring the fringes of the Hool Marshes to assess nearby threats. After several successful forays into the marshes, they managed to outsmart and kill a strange, wingless dragon which they had determined to be responsible for encouraging the bullywugs of the

swamp to attack Bale Keep in years past. With apparent threats curtailed and the keep restored and once again garrisoned, Aiken and his men headed north to oversee the construction of a stout little keep on a small hill located where the Kingfisher and Janustream rivers met just south of the Silverstand. From there, a garrison could watch the road north from Saltmarsh, merchants could trade with sylvan elves native to the Silverstand, and the nearby fringes of the Dreadwood could be more closely monitored. It remains well-maintained and manned to this day.

By the time Burle Keep was completed in 558 CY, Aiken was very popular with the viscounty soldiery for he was a friendly, fair, and thoughtful leader. Aiken enjoyed life in the field and rarely returned to Seaton. However, during one such visit, Aiken realized his parents were attempting to play matchmaker in an effort to end his voluntary bachelorhood as they invited minor noble families, who all coincidentally had charming daughters of marriageable age, from throughout the kingdom to visit their manor. After all, as heir to the title of Viscount of Salinmoor, he would need to wed eventually. Aiken, aware that his father's health had begun to decline, agreed to pick one of the women to court upon completing his next fortification construction, that of Brinestone Keep (which would serve both to provide reinforcements to Bale Keep and to guard the environs west of the sleepy town of Saltmarsh).

Soon thereafter, when he was ordered to attend the Duke of Gradsul's court during the summer of 560 CY, so that the duke might get to know him better, he met the Lady Lizbeth Rheyd, second daughter of the Count of Nimlee, and fortuitously fell in love. The pair began to correspond as he resumed his duties in Seaton, which he attacked with more gusto due to concerns over his father's failing health throughout 561 CY. Several

months later, and with all appropriate matchmakers satisfied, including his parents, her parents, and even the Duke of Gradsul, Lady Lizbeth and The Honorable Master of Salinmoor were engaged. Due to his father's health, the wedding came quickly; a good thing as barely a week later, the viscount's lungs failed him. After the appropriate mourning period, Aiken and Lizbeth were acknowledged as the new Viscount and Viscountess of Salinmoor, respectively, by his liege lord the Duke of Gradsul.

Upon his father's passing, Aiken, having to focus on his new duties as viscount, appointed Eliander Fireborn as leader of the viscounty's military forces. A brave and loyal officer of the Keoish army, Eliander was very familiar with the dangers of the Dreadwood, having lost his leg to an owlbear in the forest's depths while leading a patrol as a young lieutenant. No longer young when appointed head of the viscounty's military, Eliander served only for a few years before retiring and accepting a position in Saltmarsh as captain of the town guard. Aiken promptly named him a member of the town's ruling council, which some prominent citizens of Saltmarsh grumbled as an overreaching abuse of authority on the part of the viscount. Eliander remains loyal to the viscount and the crown above all.

Initially dreading court life, Aiken soon found Lizbeth, who was well-versed in courtly manners and duties due to her time as a Lady-in-Waiting in the court of King Trevlyan III, an invaluable partner in the running of the viscounty's affairs. In 564 CY, when the pair traveled to Niola Dra for King Kimbertos Skotti's coronation, it was Lizbeth who helped Aiken navigate the complexities of the royal court. The new king was so impressed with the viscount's military accomplishments, modest nature, and strategic acumen that he pledged the funds to have a castle built in Seaton and a small fleet relocated there from

Gradsul. Honored, Aiken spent several weeks meeting with royal engineers to plan the castle's construction before he and his lady returned home.

Upon arriving home, Lizbeth was excited to tell Aiken that he was going to be a father. In 565 CY, Cronin was born as construction on Seaton Castle was underway. Of ambitious design, the castle walls extended to encircle the entirety of the town, leaving only the port exposed. During its construction, which lasted five years, Cronin could often be seen scampering about the unfinished walls whenever he had eluded his nanny.

With the castle's construction completed and its garrison supplemented by naval forces from Gradsul, during the early 570s Seaton became an important strategic location from which to combat piracy in the Azure Sea, monster incursions from the Dreadwood, or humanoid menaces from the Hool Marshes. As Seaton's population demographics shifted from civilian fisherfolk to military veterans and their families, Seaton grew from a sleepy backwater town to a small city in the span of a few years. As a result, plans for a ferry to cross the river are being drawn up as the town is expected to grow in the years ahead.

DISTRICTS OF SEATON

SEATON CASTLE

Seaton Castle is a fairly new castle as construction was completed a mere five years ago. Unorthodox in its long but narrow design, the castle occupies a very defensible position on a rocky outcropping that both overlooks Seaton Port and the Salin River's mouth. A ditch, crossed by an operational drawbridge, separates the West Barbican from the city. Eight round towers adorn its main walls while six smaller towers defend the barbicans, three on each side. The viscount family apartments are located in the Inner Ward while

the halls, chapel (multi-denominational), kitchen, and stables, are all located in the Outer Ward. Thirty soldiers (fifteen crossbowmen) stand watch in the castle at all times.

DM's Notes: The castle's staff carpenter is secretly a cleric of Syrul and member of the Scarlet Brotherhood.

THE POINT

The southwestern portion of the city nearest the castle, The Point is home to Seaton Manor, Keoish military administrative offices and barracks, and the residences of various minor nobles who are part of the viscount's court (such as Dobbs Manor). The city's finest inn, the Gold Dog, is also located here. This neighborhood is separated from the rest of the city by a stout wooden palisade patrolled by Keoish soldiers. One gate, which remains open during daylight hours, manned by a pair of soldiers, is the only entrance into this area. The guards tend to be familiar with those who belong and make sure no beggars or other undesirables enter the area.

The largest structure in The Point is Seaton Manor. Perhaps small by Gradsul standards, the manor is a fine old three-story structure that is home to the Lord Mayor Baron Seaton's family. The manor is used to entertain visiting nobles who are not important enough to be hosted by the viscount. While the Lord Mayor Baron Seaton holds court every morning in the castle's Lesser Hall, the bulk of the city's administrative business is conducted from a nearby building which contains offices for the town's clerks, tax collectors, and The Gold Dog, identified by a sign out front of a large gold coin bearing the silhouette of a dog, is the only tavern and inn in The Point. The menu here is the finest in Seaton; wines from distant lands can be found, and the clientele is the most up-scale—senior military officers not eating at the nearby mess hall, minor nobles who do not employ full-time cooks,

senior officials to Lord Mayor Baron Seaton or the viscount who are not eating in the castle that day, and leading merchants. Rooms are clean but expensive and guests are expected to behave with manners and decorum. Paul o' the Rocks, the city's most popular bard, often performs here.

DM's Notes: Baronet Roger Dobbs (NE male human noble), bastard son of the previous Baronet by way of a scullery maid, was legitimized after his father failed to sire any heirs with the Lady Dobbs. Roger inherited the family house and small fortune, as well as a minor role in the Viscount's court, when Baronet and Lady Dobbs tragically died, swept overboard off their pleasure skiff by a rogue wave (neither could swim). A boorish man who grew up playing in Seaton's streets with sailors' and laborer's children, Roger speaks Keoland's version of Thieves Cant and is facing financial ruin as he has no idea how to properly manage his estate; as a result, he has secretly begun recruiting various local ne'er-do-wells to form the city's first thieves guild and effort likely doomed to failure due to the lawful nature of the town's citizens and constabulary.

PORT SEATON

Located outside Seaton's wall along the Azure Sea shoreline, the town's docks, wharfs, and piers of Port Seaton are well-maintained and busy with traffic. A small port but with good depth near the shore, vessels from all over the Azure Sea can usually be found docked here along with sailors looking for a berth, beggars looking for a coin, and longshoremen earning a day's wages. To help facilitate traffic flow, there are several gates through the southern town wall, each manned by a squad of soldiers and tax collectors. The docks located nearest the castle are usually reserved for Keoish naval vessels. Two notable small churches are located here: one dedicated to Osprem and one to Xerbo.

There are no inns in Port Seaton, just a flop house or two and several disreputable taverns serving the cheapest, and most watered down, ales and wines. The only tavern fit for polite company, the Red Anchor (indicated by an actual large anchor painted red lying beside the front door), is usually full of ships' captains and first mates who wish to conduct business outside Seaton proper, for various reasons.

DM's Notes: Dead Robb (LE male human bandit), so called because he often smells worse than the dead, is a failed homeless pirate who shuffles about, looking for anything valuable which may have fallen off a boat or out of anyone's pockets. If anything criminal is happening in Port Seaton, Dead Robb likely knows about it (and is likely to be involved as he serves as an informant to Baronet Dobbs). The Osprem and Xerbo churches are each led by one half of a divorced couple who feud bitterly: respectively Priestess Suzeena (LN female human priest) and Priestess Markalla (N female human priest).

WAREHOUSE ROW

Just inside the town wall opposite the docks, Warehouse Row is conveniently located for both stevedores and tax collectors. While most of the warehouses are in the usual state of repair, an abandoned fishmongers' warehouse located near the town's eastern wall looks ready to collapse at any moment. Next to it, as far from The Point as possible, is the loud and bright gambling hall known as the Lucky Seal.

The Lucky Seal is by far the largest, and best, gambling hall between Gradsul and Monmurg. Guarded by well-paid retired soldiers and other toughs, and located in a solidly built warehouse, the Seal is first entered via a bar called the Blue Wave. Behind a curtain guarded by several armed guards, visitors enter the White Swan, an upscale tavern frequented by the casino's high rollers. Those clearly without the funds for high stakes gambling are

not allowed, all others must pay the 1 gp cover charge. Beyond the White Swan, stairs lead down into the gambling hall, which is serviced by its own bartender behind a small bar stocked with fine wines, liquors, and ales. Finally, past the gambling hall, one can find the Lucky Seal's fighting pit where Seaton's resident bloodsport fans wager on the evening's bouts arranged by Dana Black (N male human gladiator). Like most successful casinos, the counter measures here to defeat cheating are very robust and magically augmented (at least one invisible stalker is known to be in service as a bouncer here although no one knows who summoned it).

DM's Notes: Recently, a new high roller, an obese dwarf merchant named Tornik (secretly Lord Obmi of luz's Boneshadow; CE male mountain dwarf fighter 5/rogue 7 [5e stats at the end of this article]) has arrived in the viscounty. Pretending to be an expert in silver, Obmi splits his time between Saltmarsh (where he can be found at the Wicker Goat), the dwarven mining operation (where he can be found trading for silver to maintain his cover), and Seaton. In Saltmarsh, he secretly meets with the tiefling Captain Xendros (CE female tiefling priest of luz) as he has been tasked with helping her build an luzian network in the region. When in Seaton, he gambles in high-stakes games at the Lucky Seal and rents a room in the Gold Dog—both of which have already given him some access to Seaton's minor nobles and civic leaders, connections he hopes will allow him to develop his cover enough to survive scrutiny in Gradsul. He has also purchased a small warehouse on the docks where he has ensconced a juvenile alkilith around an interior door frame—when it reaches adulthood in the near future, it will be able to open a portal to the Abyssal layer of Azzagrat.

EASTWALL

Stretching north from Warehouse Row alongside the town's eastern

wall, Eastwall district is a residential neighborhood with homes ranging from upper lower class to upper middle class (the nicer homes are closer to the center of town and farther away from the walls). Most of the population who live here either work in the warehouses or provide administrative support to various businesses or government departments throughout the city.

DM's Notes: One of the homes in this district is owned by the Knackers, an up-and-coming group of adventurers who arrived in Seaton several months ago after adventuring their way down the eastern edge of the Dreadwood from Gradsul. Attacked by bandits riding zombie horses during their travels, they earned their nickname by chopping up the zombie horses after dealing with the bandits. As yet, they are mostly unknown in Seaton and are planning another expedition into the Dreadwood. Their members are: Alton (N male halfling sorcerer 4), Gilbert (N male human druid 4), Hadwisa (CN female human warlock 4), Ezre (N female orc bard 5), Timm (NE male human fighter 5), and Odo (CN male human barbarian 6).

GREY TOWER

While various towers adorn the town's stone walls manned by viscounty soldiers, the tower located in the northeastern corner is home to a small enclave of the mysterious Silent Ones. Always garbed in grey, its members, several of whom are albinos, blind, or both, tend to keep to themselves. The local population consider the sighting of a Silent One an ill omen and thus the area nearest this part of town is unusually devoid of activity. Rumor has it that the order's members use their arcane powers to keep various evil forces in the Dreadwood in check. On rare occasions, locals consult the Silent Ones as sages—so long as the area of research does not endanger the Silent One's mission, such entreaties are usually entertained.

DM's Notes: While it is true that the

local Silent Ones are monitoring the Dreadwood and its denizens, they are also monitoring the Azure Sea's shipping lanes for signs of unusual magical activity or threats from far away lands. In addition, they are quite curious about Sniv (see below) and suspect he knows more draconic magic than he has so far revealed. They are led by Aleeta (N female human wizard 5), a Suel woman of stern countenance who is naturally blind in her left eye.

NORTHGATE

Nestled south of the town's northern wall, this neighborhood is home to merchants, tradesmen, and craftsmen who primarily operate out of the Old Market. Merchants who are visiting the city from Gradsul or Saltmarsh often rent lodgings in this neighborhood and the neighborhood is home to several inns and taverns that cater to the resident students, journeymen, and the like.

DM's Note: Tucked into the northwestern corner of the city is the Institute of Smiting, a militaristic monastery that looks like a small castle, whose inhabitants adhere to the teachings of Heironeous. Lord Secunforth himself graduated from this institution which is now led by the Right Honourable Gennifer (LG female human holy knight). Graduates earn commissions in the Keoland army and are known for living brave, but short, lives.

WESTGATE

Another residential neighborhood, the Westgate district stretches north of The Point and is home to the town's population who work either in the castle or in The Point, including tradesmen and their apprentices. A shrine to Kord is located here inside a small fighting academy (owned by Yvonne, see below) and the god is becoming more popular with the local soldiers. Westgate itself provides access to The Crossing and is the town's least busy entrance.

DM's Notes: A large house in this district is home to the Friends of the

Dragon, a semi-retired adventuring party who are minorly famous in the city due to wealth they acquired during past adventures in the Amedio Jungle. Their members are Oriel (NG female sylvan elf bard 7), Dreali (CG female high elf rogue 7), Ralf (NG male human ranger 8), Reynard (CG male human cleric 9 of Kord), Yvonne (LN female human fighter 7), and the most unusual resident in town, Sniv (LN male gold kobold wizard 6). The group met Sniv when they befriended his master, a gold dragon, while adventuring in the Amedio Jungle and the kobold has recently accepted four supplicants as apprentices.

OLD MARKET

Located in the heart of the city is the town square known as Old Market. There is no New Market, everyone just refers to this part of town as Old Market for some reason. Most of the buildings here are two or three stories tall; shops are located on the ground level, merchant families live on the second floor, and their apprentices or renters live on the third floor. The largest structure in the square is the city's hospital/library, Our Lady of the Light. Vegetables, which grow well in the region due to the humidity, can be found cheaply and plentifully here.

Located just south of the market square is the town constabulary building. Constable Adelard Randolson and his men operate out of this building. The constable, who has an unimpeachable record, is utterly loyal to the Lord Mayor Baron Seaton and viscount. He expects his constables to be vigilant, polite, and respectful of the general populace and prisoners are not to be mistreated. Drunk sailors who don't cause too much trouble on a night out on the town might spend a night in the cells but they won't be snatched up by a press gang or ill-treated so long as they can pay a small fine, equivalent to renting a cheap room at an inn, the next morning.

DM's Notes: Our Lady of the Light was founded and is run by clergy of Lydia with a mission to serve the women of Seaton, be they great or small, human or otherwise. From education programs to providing shelter to a victim of domestic abuse, the nuns here work to enrich the lives of the local women. Lady Lizbeth Secunforth sits on their board of directors and offers them great political protection from patriarchal families who would see their work suffer.

BEYOND THE WALLS

THE CROSSING

Stretching across the mouth of the Salin River, The Crossing is a large earthworks dam upon which rests a gristmill, cloth mill, and a small dirt road that leads to the shore on the other side of the river. Farmers throughout Salinmoor sell their cereal grains to merchants in Seaton who then hire time on the gristmill to grind the grains into flour and middlings. The mechanisms in the cloth mill are mainly used in the creation of textiles, primarily sails and other large canvases. In the woods beyond the opposite shore, a small druid's grove is tended to by the androgenous human named Gerland (N human druid 9 of the Old Faith).

DM's Notes: Gerland, who reports to Great Druidess Reynardia "Reynard" Yargrove of the Dreadwood Forest, realizes the town is likely to expand across the river one day soon and has begun to make plans for the relocation of his grove. His grove is guarded by a treant whom he befriended years ago in the Dreadwood forest and Gilbert, of The Knackers, can often be found here helping to train aspirants.

CONWY ABBEY

Located several miles upriver from Seaton, stout Conwy Abbey is home to a Suel monastery. The monks here mostly keep to themselves but do venture into Seaton for holy days associated with Suel deities. They

are led by Brother Hissek (LN male human martial arts adept).

DM's Notes: Brother Hissek is quietly but vehemently opposed to the Scarlet Brotherhood.

DWARVEN MINING OPERATION

Within the past year, a delegation of dwarves arrived in the viscounty with a royal writ to establish a mining operation in the cliffs between Saltmarsh and Seaton. While the mine is fortified heavily in the dwarven manner, Seaton Castle also serves as a deterrent to bandits and pirates who might otherwise have attempted to raid the operation. Aiken, unsure if their efforts would lead to anything, was happy to assist the dwarves in the design of their fortifications and, while doing so, formed a strong relationship with their leader, Manistrad Copperlinks (LN female dwarf veteran), who appreciated his honesty and lack of fear of getting his hands dirty. The fact that the mine has begun to produce silver in significant quantities has increased the prominence of the viscounty in the Keoland's economy and, hence, the importance of Seaton in protecting the newfound wealth. Manistrad splits her time between the mines and her offices in

Saltmarsh, where she has been appointed to the town council by royal decree (at Aiken's suggestion) so as to bolster the loyalist's power in that town.

DM's Notes: Lord Obmi, disguised as a silver merchant, has insinuated himself here and now has several informants who feed him information about when the next silver shipments will depart the mine. Obmi, in turn, feeds this information to Captain Xendros in Saltmarsh who is planning a raid upon one of the caravans with the luzian inhabitants of Abbey Isle.

HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

ALL SALINMOOR BOAT SHOW - RICHFEST

Held during the Sealords' Feast each summer, the All Salinmoor Boat Show is the viscounty's biggest boat regatta. Yacht races attract throngs of spectators on the shore and the Festival of the Blue Moon sees Seaton decorated in blues and greens. Children wear homemade costumes resembling sea creatures and it is not unusual for friendly

underwater humanoids to slip ashore and enjoy the festivities unnoticed.

REGAL GAMES — BREWFEST

Held annually as part of the Feast of Wenta celebrations, the Regal Games in Seaton is a strange mix of martial contests and outdoor folk music festival. Farmers in particular hold this holiday dear as they give thanks to Wenta for her blessings of the summer harvest. Salinmoor military units parade through the streets in full regalia, often attracting new recruits in the process.

SEATON HONEY FESTIVAL — 7TH OF PATCHWALL

Each year during the Bellringer's Feast, Seaton's candymakers and bakers make gifts of honeyed treats to the city's children. Beekeepers from all over Salinmoor are celebrated and set up stalls in the Old Marketplace, selling their meads and honeycombs. A very serious honey crafting competition judges the wares of each beekeeper's stock with the winner being awarded a gold medal, shaped like a bee of course, by the Lord Mayor Baron Seaton himself.

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OMNIPOTENT VIEWS: THE LEGACY FLEET

Ancient naval operations of the Suel Empire

By Rich DiIola

From a speech given long ago by Lord Ulan-Tor of the Suel Imperium to his underlings; in the year of Suel Dominion—4710 SD (-806 CY).

His boots scraped on the roughhewn stone of the Olman temple square, and Ulan-Tor looked over the group of his followers, ready to speak. He was a noble, and it was his obligation to inform his uneducated underlings. They had come here and fought for the land, and these many and varied people followed him loyally.

He tried stretching his sides while trying to keep a commanding stance. The Amedio sun was beating down on them, baking the stone making it even hotter, and making his underlings restless.

He began to tell them the history of how they came to be here. He raised his voice clearly and projected out into the plaza.

“Hear me and know the sacred history and heritage of our mission!”, he boomed out over the small crowd.

“The port city of Xer-Sul is the largest saltwater port of the Suel Imperium, located at the mouth of the great river Resol-Brind, which pours from the Imperial Basin’s inner seas into the Pearl Sea. Its full name is “Xerbo’s gate for the greater glory of the Suel Imperium”, but that being a mouthful, most people commonly refer to it as Xer-Sul. The city is small compared to many within the Imperial Basin, only reaching 120,000 people. By contrast Suendrako the Imperial City itself, contains around 1 million people, and the whole of the Empire roughly 20 million people.

“The Resol-Brind valley consists of the lands on either side of the river leading to the Pearl Sea, and bound on both sides by small mountain ranges. Although the valley is nominally under the mandate of House Sohrasto, the city of Xer-Sul and surrounding area has many parcels of land controlled by the other eleven Houses of the Empire. The Emperor wants to ensure that although House Sohrasto remains

responsible for keeping the flow of traffic up and down the river secure, they do not have full control over the ocean trade of the Empire. Most inland Houses are not interested in exploring and dealing with the outside world, so they keep only small contingents within the valley and mercantile agents in the city itself. The net effect is that the population of the valley is predominantly comprised of members of House Sohrasto. The other Houses maintain “diplomatic” agents to watch over House Sohrasto or small shipbuilding facilities for the rare, discrete international journeys.

“The valley is mostly kept as a woodland preserve, with forestry being the main occupation of the province. The lumber produced by the valley is used to build the great ships the Empire uses in their naval trade and exploration within and beyond the Pearl Sea. The Houses that harvest the forests of the valley have a reforestation program whereby the raw materials are preserved for future generations. The trees and vegetation in the valley have been carefully managed over the centuries to support the Suel’s requirement to build ships most effectively and support the population of workers.

“The overall population of House Sohrasto is lower than many of the other major Houses within the Empire as their lands within the Imperial Basin, located at the head of the Resol-Brind river, are small, and the Resol-Brind valley itself is sparse of people. Although House Sohrasto has planted many colonies among the disparate islands of the Pearl Sea, and as these grow the might of House Sohrasto will grow accordingly. Over the last few centuries, some of the other Houses have seen the potential in these far-flung colonies and have also begun exploiting some of the nearby islands and setting up colonies of their own.

“Until we met the Olman Empire.

“At first, we traded successfully with the colonies they set up on the southern tip of the Amedio jungle, most notably the city-state of Xamaclan. We

even shared many of the larger islands, setting up colonies on different sides of the island and trading between them. But over the last few decades, more and more of the Olman ships have entered our shared domains, and these new Olman are a lot more aggressive. At first it was simply that they refused to share any new islands with our colonists, but more recently some of the towns we’ve established on our other, further islands have been conquered. Through divination and more mundane means, we have surmised the Olman Empire is losing control of its original homeland, the island-continent of Hepmonaland. They are being pushed out by a ferocious tribe of humans, known as the Touv, from the southern tip of that continent.

“The Amedio branch of the Olman empire, if it can still be called that, has declared independence from the homeland and formed their own Empire. This has forced the expansionist tribes from Hepmonaland to aggressively colonize the southern islands, and come into conflict with both us and the Amedio Olman.

“Although the southern islands hold little particular interest to the current emperor, many of the Houses have holdings and mercantile interests on them. Not to mention our Suel honor refuses to accept that any lesser Empire should impinge on our sovereign rights and those of our citizens. As such, we built a huge navy for the express purpose of taking back our domains in the Pearl Sea and to teach the Olman Empire a lesson in humility they will never forget.

“We called this first wave of our fleet the Legacy Fleet, as its name will forever be ingrained in the history of the Olman people as an example of what happens when you cross the Suel Empire. Our Legacy will be an inspiration to our people as well as a warning to all our neighbors of what will happen if you do not treat justly with the Suel empire.

“The Legacy Fleet left the port of Xer-Sul four years ago, consisting of over a thousand ships of war, with hundreds

of thousands of Suel warriors, mages, and priests from all twelve of the Houses on board. It is led by Lord Grand Admiral Alzor Prolt of House Zelrad, a valiant warrior and well versed in the ways of the sea. Although born in a House located deep in the Imperial Basin, he was once a ward of House Sohrasto and his time there caused him to become passionate about the ways of seafaring. His ties to the Imperial throne were an added incentive to assign him leadership of the combined fleet. Our initial goal is to take over the Gates within the Densac gulf, which consists of the islands between the Amedio and Hepmonaland. This will drive a wedge between both branches of the Olman Empire and make it easier to force them into submission. While the majority of our forces made their way up the coast of the Amedio, forcing peace on the Olman city states found there, the Lord Admiral tasked a smaller portion to make its way directly

east to invest many of the island found within the Vohoun Ocean, between our empire and Hepmonaland. Eventually our two fleets will rejoin at the northern tip of Hepmonaland and work our way south along the coasts.

"Once we reached the Gates, the Lord Admiral along with a large portion of the remaining fleet, went East along the northern coasts of the Olman islands in the Gates. He split off another portion of the fleet to go West and continue their subjugation of the Amedio coast, thereby ensuring we have no Olman foes to the rear.

"Our task force was to follow the southern coast of the Olman islands and shadow that of the Lord Admiral's on the northern coast. That was the plan, until we came to this island.

Where we encountered the Olman god.

"Hearing the news of our inability to kill the god and only to bind it, the Lord Admiral decided to split the fleet once

again by sending a small force to the southeast and making all speed towards the southern end of Hepmonaland. Their assignment is to open diplomatic ties with the Touv and find out if they know how to kill the god. He sent word back to the southern fleet with warnings should they encounter any more Olman gods among the islands in the Vouhoun. He also sent messages to the Western fleet, investigating the Amedio coast, with the same warning.

"And that is how the Legacy Fleet now stands, as far as I know—A medium-sized Western Fleet investigating the Amedio, a large-sized Eastern Fleet making its way towards northern Hepmonaland, a medium-sized Southern fleet investigating the islands in the Vouhoun and a small-sized fleet making all haste towards the southern end of Hepmonaland to speak with the Touv."



THE SHELTERING ANCESTORS



Olven lore: hidden secrets about olven trees!

By Les Reno

The Suor'na Nelthuon, or Sheltering Ancestors are among the most intriguing mysteries of Olvenkind. These old trees stand at the borders of elven territories, with especially ancient examples located at the edges of High Elven kingdoms. As a rule, only a community's leaders and the most senior of elves know of the trees' existence, although these elders sometimes share the secret with loyal scouts and spies and trusted warriors. Those who learn of the Ancestors swear the strongest and most binding of oaths, vowing to impart the knowledge only to the worthiest spirits in times of greatest need.

Over the centuries, human weakness has justified elven reticence about the Ancestors. From the perfidy of the Ur-Flan to the final conflict of mutual annihilation between Suel and Baklunish empires to the moral decay of the Great Kingdom, elves have seen the devastation wrought by beings of great innovation but limited perspective. Humans have a habit of recording secrets where the unworthy can easily discover them, and their brief lives inspire a fear of death that leads too often to bargaining, including offering revelation of things best left concealed, in exchange for their lives. As human and elven populations came to co-exist, sharing borders and information and, in some instances, beds, elder elves conceived various tales and explanations for their young to pass along to human companions. Best that most outsiders regard the Ancestors as mere trees subject to taboo or serving as living monuments to long-dead heroes. Only the druids of the Old Faith suspect something of the Ancestors' true nature, but they have demonstrated discretion and restraint in the matter.

The oldest Sheltering Ancestors represent the current form of the first elven rulers to have walked the land. These legendary figures offered their lives to the forests settled by their people. However, this offer did not entail their deaths. Whatever ritual these forebearers performed mixed

their essences with those of the woodlands. Their spirits mingled with the land's enduring presence; their minds merged with the slow awareness of trees and bushes and grasses. As the great leaders passed deeper into their autumnal years, they began receiving waking visions from the forests. The visions induced a rapture akin to reverie, the "sleep" of the elves; aging kings, queens, and mages stared into some distant place and time, a vastness beyond even the reckoning of their kind. When roused from their communion, they smiled at expressions of concern from family, friends, and servants, then broke into strange new songs that comforted the listener. A hidden fragment in Celene's Nethalion Archive claims the songs were like calming laughter with the ambient noise of an immense greenwood as counterpoint. Finally, when the day of their transformation arrived, the rulers commanded their children and subordinates to bury them alive. They slipped again into waking reverie as the dirt fell on their faces. Within hours of their internment, their bones burst from the soil like pale saplings. Extending skyward, the bones stretched and grew beyond their original shapes and sizes. They curved and folded around each other, slowly fusing. In each instance, the bones assumed an appearance resembling that of the surrounding tall trees, but with lighter colored bark. Soon, leaves of brightest green sprouted from long branches and sharp tips, and the venerated Ancestors blended into the surroundings. The leader's immediate family, with the exception of any children, and most trusted advisors and lieutenants followed the example, giving themselves one by one to the woods. The points of inhumation yielded more Sacred Ancestors along the kingdom's original borders, with the borders themselves connecting powerful sites along the Oerth's ley lines.

As elven populations spread beyond the confines of their ancient kingdoms, clan leaders of satellite territories repeated the ritual of merging with the

land, marking the outlines of colonies, enclaves, and communes. For example, having been instructed by Celene's most powerful spellcasters in the proper techniques, the heads of the four clans who settled the Gnarlley Forest became Sheltering Ancestors. Only a handful of clan members outside the Ancestors' families were told the full truth; most elves assumed the community's wise and mighty founders had faded from years or died of misadventure. The secret was kept from the majority until they reached a certain age, at which point the elders revealed the truth after extracting vows of silence on the matter. When elves mated with humans, the offspring were told nothing. Even the most reliable of humans poses a potential threat to an Ancestor's integrity and purity, and the ritual's origins had served the interests of undiluted elven blood. Many elves, particularly grey elves, view half-elves as having a divided nature and uncertain allegiances. That this distrust likely reflects elven discomfort about their own origins and history remains an undiscussed irony. The relationship between spirit and matter is seldom simple, and it's one that elves prefer taking at face value. Despite being long-lived, elves tend to honor the past without contemplating its details. They experience actual memory as bursts of sensation, specifics tugging at threads of remembered passion. Their most brilliant thoughts flicker and drift across physical surfaces. As if drawn tide-like by objects reflecting the mind's traveling light, reservoirs of deepest feeling swell beyond containment and overwhelm the elves' surroundings. Elves are intelligent and profound but also thoughtless. Few elders meditate upon the implications of the Ancestors' beginnings, of separate essences and modes of consciousness uniting to make a new and distinct entity. Instead, the elders see themselves in the Ancestors; they see the sum of their lives in their race's past glories. As they approach the moment of transition between existences, the elders' ever-deepening reveries submerge the Ancestors' reality in a flood of longing for some measure of

permanence in change.

Elders whose spirits return to the world gain new bodies and fresh minds.

These young forms are prone to impulsive behavior. They sometimes take human lovers, a choice that would mortify their former selves but undoubtedly amuses some of the eternal Ancestors.

The placement of Sheltering Ancestors reveals much about the expansion and contraction of elven territory. Three Ancestors form an arc into the Suss, implying that the Kingdom of Celene once claimed undisputed sovereignty over parts of that eerie forest. The Knights of Luna and the Kingdom's scouts and spies, including the half-elf Keldrin Thade, avail themselves of the Ancestors' aid and protection when patrolling the Suss or carrying out missions against the Orcish Empire of the Pomarj. As trusted soldiers who have proven their worth through decades of service to the Court, Keldrin and his cohorts are exceptions to the rule that clan elders never tell half-elves of the trees' existence. Of course, half-elves without official approval sometimes stumble upon the truth. The elders coerce silence from such individuals, even when this requires wiping the half-elf's memories of their encounter with an Ancestor.

Only elves and half-elves can see the elvish script at eye level on the tree's trunk. The elegant writing reveals the Ancestor's name and clan. Over the centuries, surrounding trees have taken on some of the Ancestor's coloration, and clans have used their magical crafts to inscribe the names of later elves on neighboring trunks. To the uninitiated, the spot resembles what the elders claim it to be, a site of commemoration. This is, of course, a partial truth.

Those aware of this partial deception know they must approach the Ancestor and spend several minutes attuning their consciousness to the tree's state of being. During this process, the supplicant elf appears to be in reverie, and in fact enters into a sort of shared dreaming, an exchange between the elf's former, present, and future selves and the tree's slow and uninterrupted sentience. Once in harmony with the tree, the elf places a hand against the trunk, and any observers witness the entire arm seeming to pass directly into

the bark. Although what follows takes only seconds, the petitioner experiences a slowing of time. It's as if the hand pushes into and through some viscous substance until hard, wiry fingertips brush against the elf's fingers, and a bony hand clasps living flesh in a strong and approving grip. The elf rotates the hand, and something inside the trunk clicks, the sound somehow reminiscent of both a snapping twig and a turning lock.

An arched door appears in the tree trunk and opens inward. It has no visible hinges or joints. The door is simply there, suspended while it's open and sealing the interior perfectly when it's closed.

Sheltering Ancestors present themselves according to the thoughts of those who open them. Their walls can consist of elaborate wooden scrollwork or simple solid wood. The size of the interior also varies, with some Ancestors revealing a single massive chamber, and others offering a large central room with bedding and smaller rooms for solitary meditation and the preparation of poultices or simple vegetarian meals. The interior is always several times larger than the exterior would suggest. When the trees are in regular use, scouts and soldiers often leave behind supplies and rations in carved wooden chests reflective of local elven culture.

The combination of powerful ritual magic and connection to Oerth's ley lines grants Sheltering Ancestors an unusual relationship to time as well as space. Three hours spent inside an Ancestor is roughly equivalent to a full twenty-four outside. An individual spending a little under a day within the tree emerges to find that a week has passed. Healing is accelerated; injuries and exhaustion diminish according to the time that has gone by *outside the trunk. Such qualities make the trees especially useful to injured warriors and elves fleeing pursuers.*

The Ancestors are conscious beings. Those who have lingered too long within an Ancestor report bad dreams and an increasing sense of claustrophobia. The trees can provide elves with ancestral knowledge and information about the surrounding area through meditation and silent communion. The Ancestors are judicious. Creatures of evil alignment who approach within thirty feet of a Sacred Ancestor experience a piercing migraine, the result of the tree's

consciousness lashing out at the intruder. The pain intensifies until the interloper withdraws or collapses.

Anyone striking an Ancestor is attacked by harassing fey and packs of woodland animals or, in extreme and persistent cases, targeted by lightning bolts. However, these defenses are not always sufficient. A letter from an acquaintance to Curley Greenleaf suggests destruction of several Sacred Ancestors exacerbated the xenophobia common to wood elves of the Vesve Forest. Iuzians demolished the Ancestors intentionally but without understanding. Trees were being leveled for fuel when labor stalled. Orcs complained of great pain, rampaging deer and bears, and fires from the sky. To hasten the resumed impact of axe blades on wood, casters commanded demons to tear down every tree in the spot, then blasted the offending area with arcane and unholy spells. The Ancestors may have cried out in distress, plaguing the Vesve's elven population with a sense that their ties to deep time and the land had been carelessly and brutally mangled by outsiders; the Iuzians included human wizards and priests, worsening existing tensions between sylvan elf and human. The druid-ranger's associate further speculates that some of neighboring Highfolk's elves, those who had maintained and observed ancient customs for so long in the bustle and chatter of a Free City, might have experienced the Ancestors' death cries as "a Call of Blood, Wood, and Bone." Even those Highfolk elves removed from the old ways by centuries of exchange with other peoples must have felt that terrible disruption on some basic level. Conscious and unconscious thoughts collectively moved beyond protecting the woodlands to plotting revenge for the slaughter of sacred trees. If Old Wicked desired a fight to the death over the Vesve, his minions surely bought him one. The elves would have fought against invaders in any case, but thoughtless destruction of Ancestors provoked even greater rage.

In special circumstances, an Ancestor may allow its descendants to remove part of its bone-wood. Some narratives claim that Thorell Sarnas fashioned staves for the region's three Archdruids from some strange ligneous substance; the surviving example appears to be made from an Ancestor's branch. The material was undoubtedly a gift from the elves to the Old Faith as reward for

some service or as the token of some secret arrangement. Similarly, oral histories usually describe the fabled warclub of Old Kalvadorn, the Flan hero-founder of Badwall, as being made of oak, but some versions claim the elves gifted him the weapon and describe it as being of remarkably strong, incredibly pale wood.

Grugach are known to avoid Sacred Ancestors, perhaps due to superstitious awe at the magics involved in their creation. With their obsessive pursuit of dominance and mastery, drow have no equivalent to the Ancestors and are said to hate the trees as much as they despise daylight. Sailor's tales speak of aquatic elves having a tradition in which powerful individuals from ancient times allowed themselves to join with especially hard scleractinia, their bones fusing and expanding with the stony coral and crafting it into larger, tougher, more beautiful forms. Whether or not these structures serve the same purposes for sea elves that Sheltering Ancestors do for their surface-dwelling kin remains uncertain.

Notes

Chapter Nine of Andre Norton's **Quag Keep** triggered the thinking about elves and trees that resulted in this article. In the novel, the elf Ingrge leads his companions past a door made of thick vines and into a space filled with low-hanging and delicious fruit and cots and carpeting of further vines. Norton implies this is a place made for and used primarily by elves. Returning to the book after many years, I found the scene reminded me of ancient rituals involving kings and trees, as well as various accounts of trees emerging from the remains of fallen soldiers or concealed corpses. What other secret shelters might the elves have hidden in various forests? Would

they all seem like the TARDIS from **Doctor Who**, bigger on the outside than the exterior implies? Old Faith druids, especially those such as the half-elf Curley Greenleaf from Gary Gygax's **Gord** books, would certainly know or suspect something about such things. If the trees were planted along borders, perhaps the elves expanded beyond them as the centuries unfolded. Maybe they later withdrew behind them. And what if the trees were living versions of their ancestors? That would explain the



hostility towards humans and others in certain regions. These humans who call us neighbors when they think of us at all have the temerity to demand we explain why a place or object is sacred, and the delusional self-importance to weigh our declaration and find it lacking... and they murder our Ancestors with saw and axe.

Roger E. Moore's "The Elven Point of

View" (in **Dragon** #60, pp. 6-8) remains important, particularly in its discussion of the crescent moon as Corellon's holy symbol and its meaning. Those interested in what the Ancestors willingly surrendered to protect and help their people can consult the First and Third Edition **Manual of the Planes** and Colin McComb's Second Edition **On Hallowed Ground** for details on Arvendor/Arvanaith. While derided by some fans, McComb's **The Complete Book of Elves** contains many useful

insights. **Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes**

complements and reworks some of McComb's ideas about elven aging, death, and reincarnation for Fifth Edition. As this article elaborates upon the psychology and history of Oerth's elves; differences between the cosmologies of each edition were of less interest than similarities, overlaps, and general tone.

Keldrin Thade and Celene's border patrols and scouts were described in **Dragon** #292 (p. 101). The Knights of Luna first appeared in the **From the Ashes** campaign book.

For more on Thorell Sarnas, see "Legends of the Gnarley Forest: The Sarnas Weapons" in **Oerth Journal** #33. My forthcoming article "The Beekeepers of Badwall" tells of a key incident involving the Flan hero Old Kalvadorn and his famous club.

A former scout or aristocratic elf might know the location of Sheltering Ancestors. Such player characters should have the option of bringing their party to the tree for healing or to evade pursuit. Of course, the character should expect questions and

consequences from nobles or clan elders, even if the Ancestor allows the "outsiders" to come inside. The DM should also keep in mind that Ancestors are individuals and have different personalities. Some will lash out at any humans who approach them. Others will search the humans' minds and souls and welcome anyone of good character,

or those whose goals serve the good of the Ancestor's people. Think of the nearest elves and their attitudes and relationships, think of their cumulative collective experiences, then play the tree's personality as if it's a nonverbal local. Sometimes the perspectives of Ancestors and their elven descendants might be at odds, with the elves believing they are "protecting" the sacred tree while the Ancestor pursues its own agenda.

Sheltering Ancestors provide unique opportunities for role-playing. DMs should allow elven PCs to speak with the Ancestor during reverie. The Ancestor might appear in a vision in its

current aspect, as its former self, or in the semblance of whichever elven deity best represents its present mindset. The Ancestor is simultaneously the surviving consciousness of the antique elven leader and the land's awareness of activity and use; this powerful combination can serve as an instrument through which the gods communicate with their followers.

Player characters might defend the Ancestor against some unwitting threat or investigate aggressive behavior when elves target lumbermen.

Because of their long lives, Chaotic predisposition, and mercurial

personalities, elves are slow to give their word to humans, who can't appreciate or understand that elven "moods" can last briefly or for centuries, that elven emotions can influence but are also shaped by their environments. But they are creatures of their word. If a human gains access to an Ancestor in a desperate moment, they'll be asked to swear an oath to keep the tree's secret. Woe to the human who betrays the trust of beings who live such very, very long lives...

NEVER THE HEROES, PT.2

Revenge is the act of passion; vengeance is an act of justice!

By Mark "Sollace" Allen

Gaol! Morfindion sneered as he looked around the dank straw strewn cell, and all because of that madman Hrodulf. In an act of charity Morfindion had ordered the human's filthy rags to be burned and provided him with a suitable set of replacements that befit his status – a garish motley! This humiliation was the thanks he received from the ungrateful wretch for his beneficence. Arrested like a common criminal. Marched at sword-point from the Inn to this fleapit. Thrust into a cage with the unstable and unpredictable brute in his stolen clothing and Ballan the half-breed, who sat staring into the nothingness that existed a mere six inches from the end of his nose.

Morfindion ran a delicately fingered hand through his dark hair as he approached the bars, and recalled what the guard captain, Talin Fahrida, said when he had arrested them. He had a job for them, something that required their unique combination of skills, as well as their potentially disposable nature as itinerant adventurers. But the man was making them stew because of Hrodulf's actions with the Innkeeper, and in the meantime Morfindion had to listen to Hrodulf pass water into an almost full bucket while singing some bawdy sailor's tune about the sexual predilections of women of differing hair

colours...the indignity of it!

Morfindion thought back to his first meeting with Hrodulf, as a fellow passenger on the ship bound for Wragby, the journey had been largely uneventful other than observing Hrodulf's questionable behaviour – he drank far too much grog, tried to interfere with the running of the ship, and constantly picked fights with the crew. The ship's company would be glad to see him thrown overboard and were it not for his obvious fondness for violence might have been tempted to try and force the issue. Once they made landfall both he and the uncouth pirate, for that is what he suspected he was, disembarked and joined the same caravan headed inland towards Felton. Morfindion was no fool, he understood that Hrodulf had some hidden motive of his own for heading to Felton, a sleepy backwater where no one really stopped for long. However, if he could bend him to his will, convince him that their goals were in some way aligned, the man would very likely draw the attention of watchful eyes, allowing him to blend in and conduct his investigations without arousing suspicion. Afterall, it was not like he was subtle – being remarkably quick tempered and carrying an axe that was near as big as he was. As a tool for a distraction, and perhaps even



Art by Catbat Art

protection should the need arise, he would make Hrodulf his travelling companion.

There was something else about the human that made the hair on the nape of Morfindion's neck stand on end... The man spoke the language of dragons! Not only that, but his body was also covered in inked varieties of dragon kind. Perhaps his was another name that Morfindion should add to his list? To be dealt with once his usefulness had ceased. Only time would tell, but, one

thing was for sure, he did not trust him any further than he could throw him! And so, it had come to pass, the two of them became travelling companions and were joined by Ballan a day later when they had helped him to overcome a band of gnolls that had waylaid him upon the road.

Even though the three of them had only been in Felton for ten days, Hrodulf's talent for antagonising and belittling the captain of the guard at every opportunity had made him a liability, and an obvious target for Fahrída's revenge! As if his thoughts had summoned him Captain Fahrída appeared in the doorway leading to the cells, his beard, and hair oiled until it shone in the lamplight. His broad shoulders filled the gap, the plates of his armour sliding over each other noisily as he rolled his shoulders and dropped a hand to the workmanlike hilt of his sword. "Time to go to work!" The captain drawled and spat on the floor as he approached the cell door, took a ring of keys from a hook on his belt, and opened it before stepping back. None of them were armed but that would not necessarily stop Morfindion from using his magics on the captain should the need arise. Sadly, his options were limited to a degree by the fact that the captain had wisely removed the pouches that contained all his spell components.

Morfindion scowled as the captain ushered them out into the hallway. Armed guards stood at either end brandishing spears and crossbows to keep the prisoners in line and prevent them from trying anything rash. He was not interested in what the captain had to say, all he wanted was to be free of this captivity, to once again be about the task of avenging the betrayal and murder of his family. He recalled the names that his mother had sent him just before she died, they were seared into his brain and he would have his revenge against the Cult who had swayed his former master, The Azure Doom, the Lord of Thunder, the great blue wyrm Belphourous!

The elf's sharp mind recalled the message that his mother had sent before the assassins had wiped her existence from the face of Oerth. Her words rang as clear as a bell in his brain, fuelling the cold rage and determination therein, and driving him towards his goal of revenge! "My Son, we are betrayed! Do not return! Seek out Caris VenDorne, and the half-breeds

Carraig Luck and Recarzena in Nyrondese Felton. Avenge us!" And so, he had abandoned the mission he had been on to gather intelligence about the cult to present to their Master. The visit to the great libraries of Greyhawk City forgotten as he took passage on the first ship sailing east for Wragby in Relmor Bay.

Captain Fahrída threw a sack towards Hrodulf. "There are the clothes you asked for", he said to him, returning his hand to the pommel of his sword. "Get dressed and I will tell you what you will be doing if you want to go free". As Hrodulf discarded his stolen clothing, staring each guard in the eye as he did so, before starting to dress in something that looked remarkably like the rags Morfindion had ordered burned. The captain spoke at some length about how villagers had started to disappear. The first had been a child, the daughter of a baker who had been out collecting berries not far from the town for her father's cakes. The second was a young man in his late teens who was apprenticed to the charcoal burner and had disappeared from the kiln he was tending. Next had been a husband and wife who worked as Shepherds for the local lord, then an entire farming family had gone missing from their small holding... a husband, wife, and three children under the age of ten all gone, their home abandoned with food still on the table and a spilled beaker of ale remaining behind. The only sign of any violence was their dog which was found hacked to death nearby.

"Find out who, or what, is behind these disappearances and you may go free... I may even find a few coins to give to you...". Fahrída finished as Morfindion let his surroundings intrude once again on his contemplation. "...And just to make sure you don't scarper, you will be taking Biri here with you". As he finished a lithe figure in silvered plate armour stepped up beside him. She was easily as tall as Morfindion and wore the symbol of Elhonna openly as a clasp for her cloak. It seemed to Morfindion that this again could only be fate, for the female standing before him was none other than a half-dragon! Undoubtedly, she was descended from a chromatic bloodline,

her skin was green, as was her hair, though it was darker and was bound in an unusual, thick braid that reached from her crown to halfway down her back. Her face had dark scales at the sharp edges, eyebrow ridges, jawline and her ears were swept back, almost elven looking. Four horns swept back and up towards the top of her head with the braid running between them. Her cheekbones were sharp, her eyes a golden yellow with black elongated pupils. Her lips were full, sharp fangs clearly visible in her jaws, and she had a primeval beauty about her.

"Put out your right hands" she commanded, the captain allowing her to proceed unchecked. "I will use the power of Elhonna to bind our fates together for this task", she took a small sickle shaped blade from a sheath at her waist and a small bronze bowl from a pouch and cut her palm. She let blood drop from the tip of the blade into the bowl before moving to each of them in turn, drawing their blood and mixing it with a sharp taloned finger. She closed her eyes, held her hand above the bowl and started an incantation. Both Morfindion and Hrodulf understood the phrases she uttered as they too were in the language of dragons. She called upon the power of Elhonna to bind the four of them together, to tie their fates for as long as the mission they were about to undertake lasted. If one were to fall each of the others would suffer the wrath of the Goddess and the very power of nature would destroy them. Morfindion could not see how this would be accomplished until she breathed heavily into the bowl and a noxious green cloud escaped her lips, filled the bowl and boiled away the mixture within it. He felt it enter his bloodstream like a jolt of ice water! And from the looks on both Hrodulf and Ballan's faces they too understood what had happened.



Art by Catbat Art

Captain Fahrida smiled. "A little insurance to make sure you don't just murder your way free of your obligations" he crowed.

"We must discover who or what has been plaguing Felton", Biri said with a slight sibilance to her voice. "And we will end its pestilence once and for all!". Morfindion rolled his eyes. The last thing he needed was someone watching over him, especially when that someone was a half-dragon. The risk that she might be allied with the cult was all too real and he would not let her come between him and his vengeance. Why should he care if a few mangy peasants had been spirited away from their homes? They were insignificant, distractions from his true mission. "Yes, yes", he replied, "we know how important these good people are to you. Let us be on our way to the site of the last event." He looked over at Hrodulf and Ballan, who was now listening intently. "Lead on Sister Biri, for the trail will be going cold", and the sooner this task was complete the sooner Morfindion could be about his revenge!

The day was overcast with no sign of the grey clearing as they collected their belongings and left the gaol following behind the half dragon as she led the way out of town. The



road was hard packed earth, with wheel ruts caused by farmer's wagons as they had made their way into Felton to sell at the market there and back out again. Strips of cultivated land, fallow pasture and water meadow lined both sides of the cambered lane as they walked through the oppressive, grey morning towards the site of the latest attack. This gave way to rolling pastures dotted with shaggy looking sheep as they approached a lonely looking farmstead about a mile and a half from the town itself.

The farmhouse was a single-story building, a simple, rough planked affair with two barely habitable rooms and a low thatched roof that sat level with the door frame. The windows on the south side were filled with waxed cloth to keep out the wind and rain. Inside the few

items of furniture that each of the rooms contained looked little better than firewood, and just as the captain had said looked to have been abandoned during some meagre repast. Wrinkling his nose Morfindion contemplated whether the humans had simply grown so tired of such fare that they had left of their own accord, he would not have fed such unappealing scraps to the degenerate kobold slaves that had served his former master.

Hrodulf was on one knee with his face close to the hard-packed dirt floor. "There was definitely a scuffle... but it was brief." He said without looking up from the scattered rushes as Morfindion headed for the door, there was nothing at all of interest for him in that disgusting hovel. "And the smaller ones must have been carried out, their footprints vanish", the pirate finished. Who would have thought it, Morfindion mused, the man was indeed part bloodhound as his wet dog stench suggested.

"There are more tracks out here!", Ballan called from outside of the hovel. "Let us make haste then", Morfindion answered, taking the lead and putting further meaningless debate to rest. "I do not wish to waste any more time paying a penance for Hrodulf's actions than is absolutely necessary. I have things that I need to accomplish" he finished as he adjusted the collar of his cloak against the thin, penetrating rain that had started to fall. "Yes, we should move on" Biri replied echoing the sentiment but, Morfindion suspected, for vastly different reasons. Hrodulf left the hovel chewing on a crust of stale bread and Morfindion could feel his stomach roil in disgust. Ballan and Hrodulf had a brief conversation which Morfindion pointedly ignored before leading their small group off to the Northeast away from the smallholding and past the flyblown corpse of the dog that the captain had spoken of and towards the Oldred road.

The forest wrapped its dark fist around them like a miser grasping a coin and Morfindion hated it. His feet were wet inside his boots and though the dark canopy of the trees was keeping most of the rain off, everywhere and everything was being smothered by an all-encompassing dampness which crept like mould into his clothing. Worse than that, the wet dog smell that emanated from Hrodulf was increasing in strength the more damp he became. It was beginning to become so powerful that

Morfindion was following almost thirty feet behind where he and Ballan were following the trail. Two hours now they had been following the trail from the hovel, two hours in the soul chilling darkness of the forest where all the sounds seemed magnified and unnatural. Morfindion hated every second of it... he longed to be home, in the great complex that was Belphourous' lair, even the inn they had been marched from, while detestable, was a palace of delights in comparison to this misery.



Hrodulf and Ballan had stopped. Ahead yawned a wide mouthed cave set into a steep escarpment. It was shaped like a great unblinking eye as the wide mouth narrowed quickly into a much smaller tunnel that disappeared into the earth. The brute seemed to be kissing his axe, no, he was talking to it. Morfindion's sensitive hearing distinctly picked out that he was calling the axe Grimmir and telling it that its thirst would be quenched soon, that it would bathe in rivers of blood... clearly insane as well as brutish. Ballan on the other hand seemed to stand as still as if he had been carved from stone. "We must keep this as quiet as possible", the half breed murmured softly, "Hrodulf and I will deal with the sentries". With that the two of them loped off in different directions into the shadowy undergrowth to either side of the game trail they had been following.

Morfindion looked down at his palm which still stung from where the sickle had cut into it. While only a superficial injury designed to draw a small amount of blood, the spell that Biri had worked had left it with a deep green hue. While he did not relish the thought of being beholden to the assignment the three of them had been coerced into, he was not prepared to run the risk of testing the priestess's magic. If the spell she had cast held then Morfindion's revenge would be over before it had even had a chance to begin.

ACCURSED FISHHOOKS (STORMHOOKS)

Storm clouds are gathering for a prank!

By Zach Houghtton

A prank item of unknown origin, this item can have dire consequences for its unwitting victim.

Several years ago, an associate of the Magister of Dyvers nearly drowned while indulging in a usually quiet pastime--fishing. Despite it being a clear day, he returned waterlogged, his fine boots ruined, with a bizarre story of a sudden storm that capsized his small fishing boat.

No one is quite sure why an artificer would make such a strange item as an Accursed Fish Hook, but there have been several reports of their use, mainly around the city of Dyvers. The Magisters themselves have been unable to find the creator, though they do have a local wizard (Eldbert of Thew) as a suspect.

Appearance: The fish hook is made of a dark metal, but is otherwise indistinguishable from any other fish hook. Only a low-grade magical presence may be found by *detect magic* or similar.

Effect: One-time use item. 1 minute after being cast in water, a storm cloud will appear immediately over the head of the nearest individual. A small thundering cloud will form 3' above the individual's head, and 20 gallons of water will pour in a 5' radius around them (same effect as a 5th level Druid *Create Water Spell*). The small rainstorm will follow the individual for 3 rounds, with an additional 20 gallons produced each round. Anyone affected must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone by the sudden deluge of water. Any paper documents, if not properly protected, may also be damaged if not ruined.

There have been some reports of the hooks being used to cause widespread chaos outside of fishing. A tavern brawl ensued several months ago when a clever rogue used one to effect his escape, resulting in serious damage to the tavern in question (although, to be fair, the floors of the establishment had not been so clean in some time).

Location: There is a 25% percent chance these may be found in some of

the less reputable establishments of Dyvers.

XP Value: 150

Gold Value: 750

Plot Seeds:

-The Magisters of Dyvers believe they have traced the manufacture of the hooks to one Eldbert of Thew (Wizard 9, Chaotic Neutral), who has connections to the extended family of the Magister. Wishing to avoid any embarrassment, they may seek to hire the PCs to investigate further and "persuade" Eldbert to cease production (if indeed he is behind their creation). Eldbert's tower is said to be on a tiny rocky islet just to the southwest of the city.

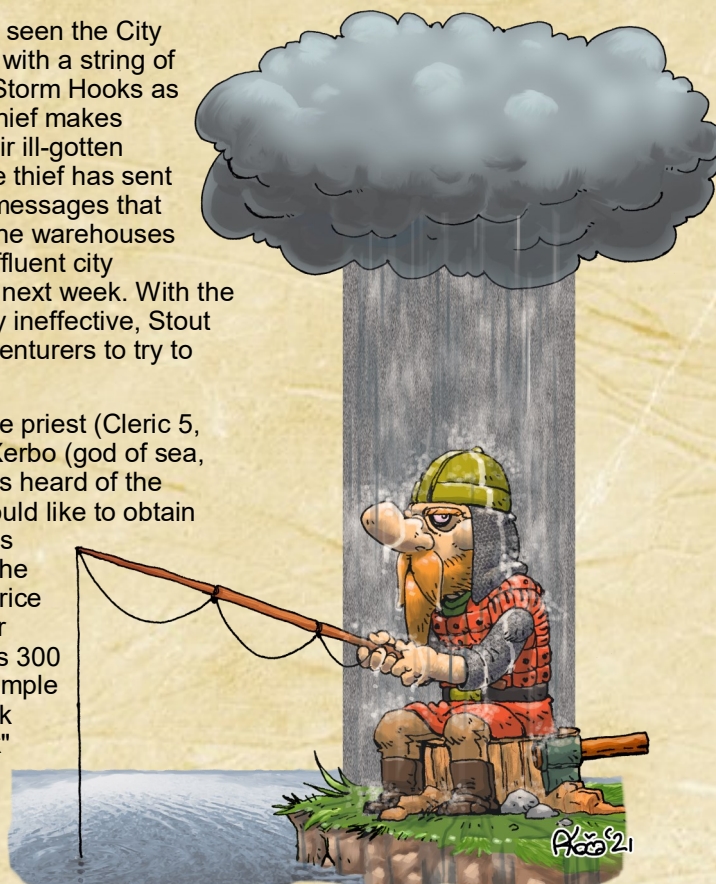
(Note: Whether or not he is the creator of the Storm Hooks is up to the DM; however, any foray to Eldbert's tower will discover he indeed loves water magic and creating havoc and mischief with the same. This is an excellent chance to include water-themed traps as part of his tower's defenses).

-The Magisters have seen the City Guard overwhelmed with a string of robberies using the Storm Hooks as a distraction as the thief makes their escape with their ill-gotten gains. Worse yet, the thief has sent a series of taunting messages that he will ruin and rob the warehouses of Jakob Stout, an affluent city merchant, within the next week. With the Guard proving wholly ineffective, Stout is looking to hire adventurers to try to prevent the robbery.

-Claiborn Fel, a rogue priest (Cleric 5, Chaotic Neutral) of Xerbo (god of sea, water, and travel) has heard of the Storm Hooks and would like to obtain several of them. He is willing to reimburse the party the purchase price (if "purchased" rather than "obtained"), plus 300 gp. (Note that the Temple of Xerbo in Greyhawk wants to have a "talk" with this wayward brother, and will gladly provide

healing and other cleric services in exchange for his safe return).

-The Dockworker's Guild had one of their meetings interrupted by a Storm Hook thanks to one Robin Silverpence, a Fishtown merchant who lost his temper over an unloading issue regarding his ship. Many documents and manifests were ruined, and Silverpence was seen fleeing the scene of the crime. Rather than see this as an expensive prank, the Guild is out for blood. They are willing to pay for Silverpence's capture so he may stand before the guild court and face their justice. They are watching every exit to the city. Silverpence is willing to offer the two fishhooks he still has plus a fee in gold to anyone who can safely get him out of the city, as well as more gold once he is safely back in Fishtown after things have been settled with the guild from a safe distance.



Art by Adam Koca

A FISTFUL OF BAUBLES



Part 3: The Black Heart

By David Leonard. of *Greyhawk Musings*

"Keraptis," the crone whispered, the "s" slithering far longer than was necessary. It was as though she were unwilling to release a most cherished memory.

Hradji held his breath as she beheld what only she could see with those nearly blind, milky-white eyes. When his patience failed him, he cautiously inhaled a breath of the acrid smoke that choked the close quarters of her earthen hut, having already learned what a deep draught would earn him. A racking cough. And her mirth. How she could live in so caustic an atmosphere bewildered him. Her lungs rattled. Her voice rasped. She should have passed years ago, decades ago, truth be told, yet she lingered on; why, how, he could not fathom.

"And who would that be?" he wheezed.

The fire cackled. So too did the crone.

"Have ye never heard of Keraptis," she hissed, her measure of irritation equal to his.

"No," he said, unsure. "Is he some long-dead jarl?" This Keraptis must be if the aged hag before him had caught his eye, judging by her obvious longing.

"Nothing so common as a jarl," she grinned. "And not me lover, neither," she said, having divined his thoughts. "He was a king for all Ages. He ruled over this land, long ago. No, he ruled over more, all he saw, over the whole of the northlands, and more. His domain reached unto Vecna's to the west, Galap-Driedel's to the mid, and Acererak's to the south."

"And who the fuck were they?"

"Them be the kings that tore these lands from the olve."

Hradji recalled tales his mor and mormor had told of those mythic boogiemens, sinister tales, made more eerie by the hot crackle of fire swirling into the night, its light dancing across their beloved faces and twisting them in the telling. None believed them. They were all in good fun. Or so they said. The Flan could never have been the terror those fables claimed they once were. They had been swept aside long

generations before by the people's coming, and those feeble primitives had never risen again. They were a docile people... a meek people... a conquered people. "What do I care of dead Flan kings? They were no match for our steel."

"Flan? No, not Flan. Ur-Flan."

"Fables to frighten children."

"Ye don't believe 'em, eh?" she growled, exasperated by his lack of awe which she so obviously felt. "Them that didn't bow to them paid a heavy price for their folly."

Hradji was tired of her cryptic warnings. "Enough prattle. Speak plain!"

"They were stricken by blight, and wasted."

"A blight?" That sounded like all fairy tales. Obey, or the gods will make you pay... The truth was, the Red Death, as it most surely was, had swept across the Flanaess every century for as long Man had walked the Oerth; so said the elders; so sang the bards. "I doubt they were the cause."

"Believe what ye will, but it is said that they waste away, to this very day."

The very air thrummed.

"Surely, thou knowest me, thief; else why hast thou come?" When Hradji did not display the presumably expected awe, the glyphic, ghostly pate stated: "*Keraptis beeth mine name.*"

"Keraptis, eh? Aren't you dead?"

The form darkened, its opacity radiating wrath. "*Dost thou presume to toy with me?*" it glared.

"No," Hradji said, wondering if he ought to back away, and run. "All tales tell of your passing,"

"*Then thou hath come to rob mine tomb.*"

Hradji hesitated for longer than was prudent, pondering how he might respond to the accusation without admitting to the simple truth that he and his men had set out for that very purpose. When he did speak, he said, "No ... we stumbled across this ruin while taking refuge from a storm." That did not sound plausible at all, he thought, considering how long, and difficult, their journey into these depths had been.

Its eyes narrowed. *Not so, I see thy soul, and know thee and thine to be thieves.*

Fear is the only enemy, Hradji's father's voice instructed him. It strengthened his resolve. "I'm no thief," he repeated, his brow tightening.

The air grew more oppressive, and the crypt seemed to grow hot despite its icy pall. The phantasmal being did not, apparently, believe his feeble excuse; not that Hradji thought it would. What did he care what it thought, anyway? For all he knew, this was little more than trickery. An illusion, albeit a clever one.

"Alright," he said, "I didn't seek refuge from a storm. I sought this city out. And I will take what I wish, if I've a mind to. No one lives here. And no one has for centuries, either. It's dead, a ruin."

This city is mine, the aspect shouted. All within it is mine!

Hradji's anger rose. Whatever this Keraptis was, he, Hradji Beartooth, was the son of a jarl, and not to be rebuked thus, like some lowborn serf. "I challenge that claim," he bellowed back, holding the black eyes with his own steady gaze. "These mountains belong to my people, if to anyone. That makes Skrellingshald and everything in it ours. Mine."

Skrellingshald? it raged. *I have never heard of this Skrellingshald. Hast thou never heard tell of the majesty of Tostencha?*

Tostencha, the crone had breathed....

Ah, you have....

Hradji suppressed the urge to shudder. Could this thing read his thoughts?

Its laughter boomed. *This is the seat of mine kingdom,*" it declared.

"Was, you mean," Hradji said, fully expecting a bolt of lightning to strike him at that very moment. When none did, he said, "Your kingdom is long dead. Your city is dead, crumbling, and infested with kobolds. And as far as I can tell, you're dead, too."

The visage darkened at Hradji's bravado. Its black eyes deepened, as might a gathering storm.

Bow before thy king, impudent thief!

"I bow before no man," Hradji said, clenching his axe tighter, "if you are a man, and not merely a shadow of what was." He stepped closer, unaware of having done so. He was resigned to the inevitable melee, regardless how it may manifest. Either I can fight it, or I can't. If he couldn't, it had been toying with him all along, and it had never intended to allow him, or his people, to ever leave. Or live. It was better to meet his, their, doom head on than to grovel before whatever this apparition might be; be it a man, a projection, a shade, or a god.

I tire of this game. I might have found use of thee, or thine form, at the very least. No matter, you shall suffer the fate of those others who hath defied me!

Forthwith, it faded, its eyes the last to slip from sight.

The walls stirred. They writhed.

Hradji gestured, and his companions tightened together, weapons ready. They looked hither and thither into the black and the gloom, none sure what might come, but that whatever it might be, it would come now.

And come it did. Wretched figures burst out of the darkness. What might have once been men rushed towards them, arms outstretched, fingers clawing at the air. Moaning. Howling. What were these, Hradji wondered? They were dead, without doubt; a mockery of life. Flesh mouldered on bone. Tattered rags hung from those few still clothed. They pitched and collided as they closed with them, as though they had only a faint memory of how their limbs functioned.

Cinniúint threw a clutch of phosphorus

dust into the air before him and a wall of fire erupted from the stone where the undead lurched, but not before half a dozen of the decrepit things had slipped beyond the fire's grasp.

Ylva stepped forward, disregarding the waves of putrid stench that enveloped her. She closed her mind to the sight of the fat green worms crawling in and out of their sockets and mouths as she raised her holy symbol and bellowed, "Begone, ye foul abominations!"

The dead thrust their arms before their faces; they howled; they screeched, if what rushed from their mouths could be deemed fear.

"Wee Jas, finds your very existence a sin," Ylva said, in greater command of her voice as her faith proved equal to the task of subduing these creatures. She strode toward the foul dead, and they backed away, within reach of the wall of flame. She thrust the brightly glowing icon before her. "BEGONE!" she yelled, the very walls shuddering at her voice. The rotted dead twisted, and turned, and reeled into that scorching wall, where they crumpled, consumed, as parchment held to a candle's flame.

The slap of wet flesh to aft alerted them to the arrival of yet more of these rotted dead racing to meet them. An ethereal, echoing laughter accompanied them, reverberating without end.

Hradji's rage banished the eerie mirth. He brushed past Cinniúint as he met the onrush, his step becoming more lively, his advance twice that of Gunnar's, who, try as he might, could not hope to match Hradji's axe as it swept before him, felling those putrid abominations as he might saplings.

What ought to be blood greased the floor before long. Hradji miraculously kept a step ahead of its pooling. Not Gunnar, who floundered, and lost his feet. He cried out as the dead swarmed over him, and might have buried him beneath their mass of questing claws had Angnar and Runolf not pressed their weight against them; pushing, thrusting, and severing those limbs that sought them and their kin.

At first, Hradji didn't hear the distant whisper uttering **Enough of this foolishness**. He only paid heed to the rise and fall of his axe. But, as the seconds passed, the whisper grew more insistent, until, like water poured on a flame, its soothing words quenched his very rage. **Hold me**

out, and I will grant you the power to finish this quickly.

Puzzled, he lowered his axe. He was clutching the agate, unsure when he had drawn it forth. It throbbed and burned, as it had when he had first plucked it from its perch. Mesmerized by its radiance, he paid no mind to the melee writhing about him, oblivious to the flow of undead spilled into the chamber.

Good, the voice said. Raise me up.

He raised it, as bidden.

Just as one of the dead burst forth and took hold of his throat, lifting him off his feet. Its eyes were lifeless, milky pools. Its breath, if the air that wafted from it could be called such, was fetid and rank as a mouldering corpse. Its other hand clawed at his face, his shoulder, his arm. He could feel its worms wriggling onto him. Biting him. Burrowing into him.

His axe fell from his grasp. He flailed. He groped for his dagger, and plunged it into its wetness, again, and again, and again. To no effect other than to release a greater stench that threatened to overwhelm him. He reeled. His vision dimmed.

"Concentrate!" the whispering voice bid. **"Repeat after me..."**

The bauble burned brightly, brilliantly, blindingly. He reached out.

And the bauble flared even brighter still.

Hradji woke to Ylva's features looming over his face. The air stank of rot, smoke and ash. He remembered the wall of fire, the blind, milky-white eyes, the fetid breath. And worms and grubs slithering over his flesh. He brushed her aside. And struggled to sit up. He threw his arms up to inspection, and found welts where the worms had feasted on him. Where they had burrowed into him. The sudden sensation of their crawling and wriggling under his skin and up his arms and into his shoulders, deranged him. He slapped at them, he scratched and clawed. To no relief.

"They're gone," she soothed, taking hold of his hands and securing them. "You've nothing to fear."

His will forced his arms into his lap. The madness abated, thankfully. Another phantom, he realized. "What happened?" he rasped. He could still feel the boney claws at his throat.

"You pressed that orb to the corpse and it turned to dust. A great many of them did."

Hradji surveyed the chamber. There were, indeed, a great many trampled piles of dust all about.

"How exactly did you do that?" Cinniúint asked.

Hradji thought he saw envy in the Flan's eyes. And unease in Scáthú's otherwise emotionless olven facade.

"Where were you?" Hradji snapped at the elf.

"Killing the dead," Scáthú said, oblivious to Hradji's anger, or merely unmoved by it. Hradji could not divine which. "Where do you think I was?" the elf asked.

Hradji wasn't sure he believed the elf. He had a habit of vanishing when trouble stirred. Hradji snorted and faced the mage. "What were those things?"

"Sons of Kyuss," Cinniúint said.

Hradji fought to his feet, pushing off what help was offered him. "And what are they?"

"Short answer? Zombies."

"Long answer?"

"Rumour has it that they are a punishment brought down on the unfaithful by an Ur-Flan warrior-priest named Kyuss, eons ago. ... it is said that they waste away, to this very day."

"Ur-Flan.... This Keraptis was one of them, wasn't he? Could he have made these Sons of Kyuss?"

"He was. Or is, if he still lives, and he could very well still. And yes, he could have."

"How can he still be alive? He ruled over these lands over a millennia ago!"

Cinniúint's eyes widened, ever so slightly. "I'm impressed. Where might you have learned that?"

The crone's milky white gaze rose unbidden in Hradji's mind. "Fables to frighten children."

"Remind me to never foster a child with the Fruztii."

Hradji scowled.

Before he could rebut, Cinniúint said, "Come now; I doubt those fables were so thorough."

"There's an old woman who knows such things," Ylva interjected.

"That fucking crone," Hradji scowled.

Cinniúint ignored the outburst. "What did she tell you about Keraptis and the Ur-Flan?"

Ylva answered when Hradji did not: "That they wielded great weapons. And that they harnessed great magics and stowed them in orbs of power. It was she that interpreted Hradji's dreams. It was her words that led us here."

The bauble! Hradji thought, only then remembering it. Just then he had the notion that he had lost it. He panned about him. He groped frantically at his pouches and pockets.

"Is this what you are looking for?" Cinniúint asked, holding the agate out. He did not touch the orb. It rested on a rough cloth and not on his naked flesh.

Hradji snatched it back.

Cinniúint considered Hradji before speaking. "These orbs are not what you seek. You should leave them."

"What?" Hradji blurted, shock, and disbelief, and anger painted across his face. "These orbs are the only thing we've found in this gods-forsaken ruin!"

"They cannot possibly help your people," Cinniúint said.

"What would you know about it?" Hradji said, struggling to keep his anger in check, and failing.

"These orbs are evil. Unspeakably evil."

'Evil dwells there, greater evil than ye have ever known'.

"Isn't all magic?" Hradji spit.

"Is a sword?" Cinniúint countered. "These are different. These orbs are sentient."

Hradji raised his palm, pondering the agate.

"Don't listen to this fool," the voice whispered.

"Beartooth," Cinniúint said, "these artifacts are ancient. And unspeakably powerful. You cannot possibly control them."

"The mage is lying. I am at your command"

"And you can?" Hradji said, burning with suspicion.

"No," Cinniúint said, "and I expect that no one I know could, either; but I have heard tell of one or two who might."

"Don't believe him. The mage covets me. He means to have me for his own."

Hradji realized then that the mage had steered them unerringly to this very place, never once searching any other room, any other vault. It was like he knew exactly where he was going.

Cinniúint said, "It's the orb, isn't it? It's speaking to you ... in your mind"

"No, Hradji lied. 'It's not.'"

It was obvious to Hradji that Cinniúint did not believe him. He suspected the others didn't, either, reading each expression in turn. Scáthú certainly didn't, but the elf and the Flan had always conspired as one, hadn't they? And they were not one of them, were they? They had been foisted upon him by Marner, much to his chagrin. 'You will have need of them', Marner had said. For all he knew, Marner had set them upon him for the very purpose of stealing what he might find! As to the others, their doubt angered him. Ylva's, especially; but she'd been fucking the Flan since they had taken to the mountains, so that was to be expected, wasn't it? As to Fridmund, Gunnar, and the twins, how dare they doubt him! Had he not fostered them, had he not taken them onto his ship, had he not protected them? How dare they conspire against him!

"If there are other, more useful weapons of power buried here," Hradji fumed, "find them!"

When they did not promptly do as bid, he shouted, "Now! Get about your business so we can be rid of this suffocating tomb!"

Gunnar was the first to obey Hradji's desperate command. Then Angnar and Runolf.

Hradji tore down an obscene tapestry, revealing the alcove it concealed, and the sarcophagus within it. He thrust the lid from it. It clung to its perch, obstinate in its reluctance to budge, until eventually crashing to the floor, cracking. Its dust, long undisturbed, roiled about him and the now gaping coffer. He shifted the remains within, heedless of what respect this dead king might deserve. He was only Flan, after

all. Had he any respect for his own remains, he should have gone to glory on a chariot of fire! There was nothing here of use! No sword, no shield, no functional armour, nothing! Only bones, and scattered scales of bronze, and shards of lapis lazuli. All else had gone to ash.

"I will not leave here empty handed," Hradji muttered. He looked to the other tapestries, wondering if the coffins behind those were as devoid of riches as this one was.

Ylva had yet to obey, he observed. She did so then, as she should already have, commanded thus by her future jarl; but not before she exchanged a word with that perfidious Flan. Hradji eyed the mage, and took note that he cast more than one glance at the dais. And at the orbs still atop their blackened candelabra.

"You have need of us all."

Hradji raised the orb to inspection. It was dull again, a simple agate. It did not whisper. It did not glow. A flight of imagination, he thought; no more than that. He thought to throw it away; but the Flan would probably palm it while no one else was looking. Or he would have that slippery sycophant of his do it for him. I'll not let him have them, Hradji thought, not a single one! "Collect them," he commanded Fridmund, who set about to do just that.

Then the bard mounted the dais slowly, softly singing:

"I now wish to end,

At home with the dísir, *
which Vatun did sendt.

Glad shall I drink ale with the æsir,
And in triumph I will sing,
for life's moments are passing,
and I shall laugh before I die." [1]

He appeared more vivid for his septet. Brighter. Braver. Stronger. Glowing with confidence. But his eyes darted here and there. Rightly so; only moments before a malevolent aspect had floated overtop that very spot. In its passing, the darkness had returned, but that darkness did not appear to mollify the bard. His voice quavered. So too his hand as he reached for the orb closest to the ebon altar. His height was not equal to the task. He laid a hand on the altar, intent on mounting it to reach that

highest of candelabra.

At that touch, the purple patterns of the walls flared darkly. The nightmarish silhouettes of red and black and purple upon the floor whirled and danced, their flow centered on the altar upon the dais. The atmosphere thickened. Sickened. And above him, it deepened, it drew, it sucked.

Ylva gasped, and Fridmund cast his eyes up and staggered back as a void coalesced where the frightful visage had once raged. Somehow, this void was far more fearsome than the face full of rage had been. If the temple had thrummed before, it verily throbbed now. It pulsed. It beat. And with each, that black heart at the center of that vile subterranean temple grew, in feature, in volume, and in ominous depth. It was far blacker than the altar, entirely devoid of light. And life.

Fridmund's very soul recoiled from the void. It grew cold, his soul, as did his flesh, leaden and lethargic, as though caressed by the polar night. They froze as he made to distance himself from this horror. His strength failed him, and he fell.

One by one, the others fell in turn, unable to move, let alone act. Or flee. It was as though the will to live had left them. They could only look helplessly on in horror as a presence undulated within the void. Only Ylva retained the will to resist. And even she could feel her life failing. She raised her holy symbol, but could not keep it aloft, so heavy was the weight on her soul, her limbs. They fell. And then she too crumpled to her knees. Her tears flowed. "Wee Jas", she cried, "have you forsaken me?"

Dread inspired Fridmund. He scrabbled back, inching away from that emptiness with each ineffectual push and claw against the montage dancing across the ancient stone.

Until what might have been smoke, or an appendage of emptiness, curled out of the swirling void. Fridmund froze as It emerged. It licked about, as though tasting what might be before it. Another unfurled. And another. They grasped the edges of that undefined nothing and spread it wider. Despite their ghostly appearance, They must have had substance, because, as They flailed about, seeking what They might, They collided with the candelabras, snapping them, sweeping them aside, scattering those baubles of agate and onyx and

jade to the corners of the black temple.

The first snapped out and up and reared as might a snake. Fridmund somehow found the strength to rise. He turned to run. For one moment, it looked as though he might succeed. Until a vacuous shriek wafted from the void. He spun. He froze. His eyes burned with such madness as the others had never seen. Fridmund's eyes screamed. He might have as well, had he not been so paralyzed by his terror.

The appendage snapped down. It curled around Fridmund. And as It embraced him, he blanched. He became as faint as It.

And then, far faster than an eye could blink, It snapped back into the oblivion It came from. Taking the ebon void with it with a crushing boom!

And Fridmund.

To be continued....

[1] Adapted from "Krákumál" (Lay of Kraka), translation by Thomas Perry, 1763

* The dísir are associated with fate who can be either benevolent or antagonistic towards mortals. The dísir play roles in Norse texts that resemble those of fylgjur, valkyries, and norns, so that some have suggested that dísir is a broad term including the other beings.

ALVYN "PURPLESOCKS" BANNOCKSBURN

Gnome Wine Merchant of the Kron Hills

By Paul "Artharn the Cleric" Jurdeczka

Alvyn "Purplesocks" Bannockburn is a gnome wine merchant from the Kron Hills. He also happens to be one of the best information brokers in the western central Flanaess, and a spy for the Assembly of the Kron Hills.

Appearance

Alvyn is a well-dressed merchant. He wears a wide brimmed hat with an ostentatious feather in the hatband. His clothes are the usual simple merchant garb, but of well-made cloth and a tailored cut. They are mainly earthy browns and greys, but with a touch of red or scarlet to add just a dash of color. He is no dandy or fop, but clearly a dapper gentleman who cares for his appearance. His garb does not mark him for a wealthy man, but to those with a keen eye, he is a man who knows his clothes.

He is of average height for a gnome, at about 3 ½ feet tall (106 cm) and weighs about 45 pounds (20kg). His skin is tanned, although its weathering speaks of his regular travels. His face always features a broad smile beneath his prodigious nose and bright eyes.

Bannockburn's dark hair is usually tied in a ponytail. His most obvious features are his ostentatiously styled, curled moustaches, forked goatee, and short sideburns.

He is about one hundred years old, and in human terms appears in his thirties.

Background

Alvyn is a member of the Bannockburn clan of the Kron Hills. Famed as wine and spirit makers he was brought up in the family business. The clan matriarch, Bodica, is in her late 300s but remains a representative to the Kron Assembly and rules her large and rambunctious family with a firm hand.

He learned his trade at the knee of his uncle Ruben, travelling to neighboring lands and negotiating sales of clan goods to a variety of people from Veluna, Furyondy, Dyvers, Greyhawk, Celene, the Wild Coast, and the Uleks. In his youth, he travelled far afield to Keoland, the Urnst states and Nyrond, and continues still.

Nicknames are popular in gnomish culture. He earned the sobriquet "Purplesocks" stomping grapes into wine in the vats at a vineyard when he was a boy. The stains on his skin from the red wine took days to fade, and it became a source of much mirth to his family. He relishes telling the tale to those that ask about it.

His uncle Ruben has retired, and Alvyn is the main agent for the clan's business, dealing with buyers throughout the central Flanaess. The Kron Hills has a small, but lucrative market in wines, liqueurs, and spirits, selling to the upper classes in surrounding realms. Alvyn immensely enjoys his opportunities to travel, meet interesting people, and see the world while earning his living.

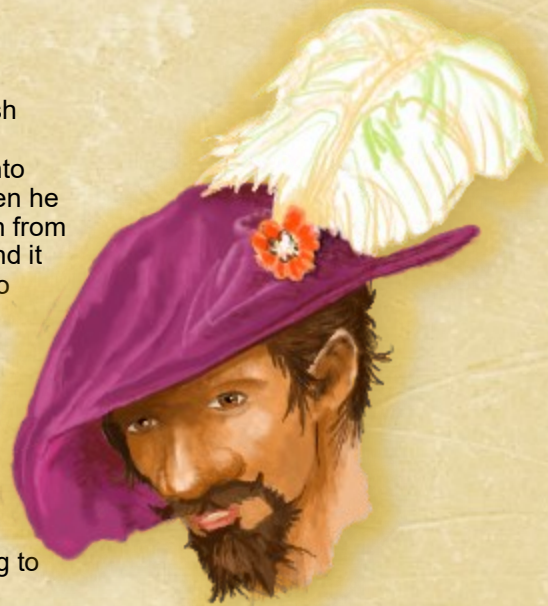
This also provides him with the perfect opportunity to perform his other calling - one of the best spies for the gnomes of the Kron Hills. Alvyn is one of the best information brokers in the central Flanaess, passing on what he hears and finds out through his network of connections. Telling those who need to know what he has learned is going on.

Connections

On his travels, Alvyn hears and sees many of the goings on in the region and passes that information onto those who need to know.

The Bannockburn clan is based in Hagthar. However, they have members scattered throughout the hills. For example, Alvyn's third cousin Sindri is a food trader in Ostverk, importing foodstuffs from many places including the Wild Coast. All these extended family members provide an easy source of gathering and disseminating information and news.

Alvyn is one of the best-connected residents of the central Flanaess. Beyond his family and mercantile dealings (which are extensive), he has connections amongst the advisers of the rulers of Veluna, Furyondy, Dyvers, Greyhawk, Celene, the Wild Coast and the Uleks. He has met Melf (Prince Brightflame - the leader of the Knights of



Art by Kristoph Nolen

Luna), the gnome Lord Corbin Jamorrie of Lorrish in Veluna, Prince Olinstaad Corond of Ulek, and Rufus and Byrne of Hommlet. He has good relations with the Gnarley Forest Rangers and the Greenjerkins of Verbobonc, who know him as a good and honest merchant who often travels in their areas and tips them off to possible dangers. He has even met the Archmage Mordenkainen on several occasions. The two pretend to vaguely recall each other in an ongoing joke, but they are well-aware of each other. Alvyn recalls first meeting Mordenkainen when they were both young adventurers on the Wild Coast and knows how old Mordenkainen really is. Of course, Mordenkainen is conscious of this and plays coy about it.

Alvyn's first loyalty is to the denizens of the Kron Hills, and they are kept safe by having strong and stable friends. As such, the neighboring realms need to be kept safe too. While tensions with Verbobonc can test that approach, usually the Viscount and the Free Assembly can ignore short term squabbles for the greater good.

As a result, Alvyn is always watching for threats and potential concerns; the orcs of the Pomarj and Blackthorn, the humanoids of the Lortmils, luz to the north, Ket to the west, and various cultists and other threats.

Personality

As a spy he hides in plain sight—he is so loud and ostentatious that he couldn't

be a spy!

Watching and listening are key to his trade, and his remarkable memory keeps track of it all. Alvyn can speak and read Gnomish, Common, Dwarvish, Elvish and Halfling. Also, his knowledge of Orcish and other goblinoid languages is sufficient to understand general ideas from an overheard conversation.

Alvyn is always moving, always talking with people everywhere.

Despite being a lifelong bachelor, Alvyn is a considerable flirt. He intentionally offers genial compliments to women and has been known to make romantic advances toward women he meets while travelling.

Alvyn is charming and friendly to almost anyone, short of those who are rude to his face. Few really know the real Alvyn—not even his own family. Beyond Bodica and some senior gnomish officials to whom he reports, most know him just as a widely travelled, sociable gnomish merchant. His connections know him to be an information broker, passing on rumors and gossip from his travels, and usually trading them for snippets in return. Those connections suspect he is a canny operator, and he is perhaps more than just a merchant, but assume he is a go-between at best. Alvyn will not reveal the information he passes on and receives which has been carefully collected and targeted, usually by Alvyn himself.

Underneath it all Alvyn is a bit of an adrenaline junky. He loves the excitement and danger inherent to his craft. While he is a careful planner and makes every effort to allow for contingencies, he knows he could never be content with the life of a simple merchant. The travel and socializing allow him the chance to play the game of spies. A game he is perfectly suited to.

Alvyn is well able to look after himself, and a crafty foe. However, he usually avoids the need to get personally involved in fights through distraction,

subterfuge, escape, or simply surrounding himself with the right “big folk” to handle the rough stuff. He is just as likely to walk into a known ambush intentionally, backstab an opponent while no one is looking if he must, and spend the aftermath thanking his adventurer friends for saving him while they wonder how he would have survived without them.

Alvyn is of Neutral Good Alignment. He is a follower of Garl Glittergold.

Possessions

Alvyn’s un-gnomish lined red cloak is easily flipped to its dark coating, to wrap as camouflage in a dark laneway or woods, or slip away through the crowd while his pursuers are looking for his red cloak.

He carries a *short sword +2*, *boots of elvenkind*, a *ring of protection*, and several doses of *dust of sneezing and choking* (for staging escapes). He will often have several useful potions handy.

He will usually be riding a good quality pony, while travelling with a well-organized caravan or merchant group.

Alvyn is relatively wealthy, as is his clan. As a result of his operations, he often gains insights and market information which he and his clan can profit from. If he were killed, his clan would make every effort to retrieve the body to resurrect him. If he were taken for ransom, his clan could pay for his return, but would be more likely to hire adventurers to rescue him to avoid rewarding such behavior. Assuming Alvyn didn’t escape on his own first.

Abilities

Alvyn has an excellent knowledge of wines and the wine trade. From Keoish golden, Urnst white, Celene green or ruby, Furondian emerald pale, Velunan fireamber to Nyrondel lime, Alvyn knows the wines of the Flanaess from the Crystalmists to Sunndi. Usually by taste. Certainly, by their value.

Use the statistics for a Spy from the 5th edition rules for him, although with +2

Intelligence, reduced size and speed for a gnome, improved AC and other abilities for his magical items, and extra languages detailed above.

Adventure Hooks

Alvyn can be a constant source of adventure hooks in a campaign. As he is a guaranteed source of rumors and news, these can be used to direct characters to adventures as needed. Either by chance or because Alvyn can see the need for adventurers to deal with problems. He might be met in an inn or tavern, at a market or shop, or on the road. He might be used as an intermediary or messenger to deliver news or instructions to characters.

Characters might find Alvyn captured and need to rescue him. Or be rescued by happenstance by Alvyn who of course is happy to try to help the new friends he has “stumbled on”.

Alvyn will usually be somewhere between comic relief and useful contact. He will turn up repeatedly on the characters’ travels, with every excuse for being there, and pleased to see his “old friends” from whenever he saw them last. Players are likely to work out that he seems to turn up in the strangest places, with surprising timing, and over time begin to suspect he is more than just a simple merchant, maybe an intermediary or even protagonist. However, he will always be coy and have a twinkle in his eye if pressed. Alvyn would never reveal his true role to anyone but those whom he trusted completely, and then only if necessary. He has a long career ahead of him to protect, and gnomes take a long-term view of their position. They remember before humans first migrated to their lands, and they are used to dealing with cultures such as dwarves and elves with longer lifespans like their own. But true friends are valuable allies in such a long-term view, and so fun to get to know too!



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